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THE VEDĀNTIC AND THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF REALITY AS INTERPRETED BY ŚAṀKARA AND NĀGĀRJUNA

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PREFACE

The idea behind the selection of a topic like this was to discover the neglected greatness of the two main thoughts of India, the Vedāntic and the Buddhist, and to unveil their revealed Reality which has the similarity of the process and the sameness of the result. According to a rational thinker, whose mind is open and heart is pure, no religion can claim perfection. All religions, which have become less reasonable and more dogmatic, have the mixture of perfection and imperfection. The best is he who takes the best of all considering it an integral part of the total truth. I have endeavored here in this paper to do likewise.

The Vedāntic discrimination of the temporality and the eternity and the ultimate goal of the eternal have been best discussed in the three basic scriptures (prasthāna traya)—the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā. The Buddhist concept of the unreality of the suffering world and the attainment of nirvāṇa as the ultimate has been best described in the three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṁgha—of the Buddha. Saṁkara's commentaries on the Vedāntic scriptures based on the theory of one Brahman without a second, ekam evādvītīyam (C.U. VI-2I-) and That art Thou, tat tvam asi (C.U. VI-8-7) is the best of the Vedānta. Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy founded on the theory of śūnyatā or emptiness of the world is, according to many, the best interpretation of Buddhism.

Words are inadequate to express my gratitude to the ever-inspiring and ever-clarifying writings of Dr. Radhakrishnan, This dissertation of mine is much indebted to his philosophical contribution.

I am grateful to Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, Dr. Donald Mork, and Mr. Nippo Syaku of the Institute, whose valuable advice, from time to time, has been of great help. My obligation is specially due to Dr. Anil Kumar Sarkar of the Institute who has been my research adviser all along this project with his immense kindness and thoughtfulness.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Vedānta and Buddhism are, more or less, scientific approach to life. As life plays the main role in the philosophies of the Vedānta and Buddhism, both means and goals are centered around the reality of life. The ultimate goal of both these great thoughts is not God or the universe but the highest of the life here and now. Life here will take care of the life hereafter, as our past has taken care of our present.

As the reality revolves around life, both the Vedāntic and the Buddhist thinkers, like many other thinkers, endeavor to unveil the long-hidden and ever-growing mysteries of life. Neither the Vedāntic seers nor the Buddhist philosophers describe the indescribable (anirvacanīya) Brahman the Absolute or nirvāṇa the Ultimate for the sake of Brahman or nirvāṇa but for the highest in life. Nothing less than the greatest is acceptable to them. Gautama Buddha's renunciation of the world at the sight of the death was not for the death but for the search of the light to fight the death for ever. The attainment of Nirvāṇa was the ultimate Reality of life the Buddha realized. The purpose of his life was fulfilled, and he experienced the fullness, the perfection of his life.

The same was the mission of Śaṁkara's renunciation (saṁnyās) at an early age. He too was in search of the meaning of this life. Unlike the Buddha, Śaṁkara preferred to dig out that ultimate Truth of life from the traditional Vedic and Vedāntic literature (the Upaniṣadas, the Brahma Sūtra, the Bhagavadgītā, and so on), and he succeeded in discovering the reality of the individual self-realization as the Universal Self-realization, Ātmajñāna as Brahmajñāna. Thou art That, tat tvam asi (C.U. VI-8-7), was Śaṁkara's greatest finding of the Vedānta.

Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, followed a different course. His dialectic method of neither this nor that nor both nor none tries to clear up the false understanding about the Real. His Mādhyamika philosophy takes the middle course between the nothingness of the nihilists and that everything exists of the Sarvāstivādins. According to his theory of śūnyatā, void, or emptiness, all things are non-essential by nature. All are empty or śūnya of their self-nature (svabhāva) and are dependent (partantra) on each other for their origination according to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of pratītyasamutpāda or dependent origination.

Both the early Buddhism and the later Vedānta are influenced by each other. The early Upaniṣadas, like the Bṛhad-ārṇyaka Upaniṣad and the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, were composed a few hundred years before the Buddha, and the philosophy of oneness, truth, nirvāṇa, bliss, vijñānam, etc., in the teachings of the Buddha is very much influenced by the Upaniṣadic philosophy of satyam, jñānam, anantam, ānandam, mokṣam, brahma, and so on. There is a sense of concord between the two ancient schools of thought. The later Vedānta, specially the Advaita or the non-dual Vedānta, after the Buddha up to Śaṁkara and onward is remarkably influenced by the global look or universalism of the Buddha. Śaṁkara's emphasis on the self-realization as the universal Self-realization (Brahman-realization) is similar to Gautama Buddha's teaching of the attainment of Buddhahood or Enlightenment. In Buddhism, an enlightened person is considered to be the wisest person, because he sees the best of his in the best of all. He glances the world with his universal eyes. The Buddha's three Jewels of Buddham, Śaṁgham, and Dharmam are the three cardinal refuges to wisdom, the community of the wise, and the law. Though these Buddhist principles do not teach directly the meaning of Upaniṣadic theory of ātman, self, or soul, yet indirectly they are aiming at the same goal of Buddhahood or Enlightenment for the individuals in the lawfully purified environment of the community of the wise. A self-realized Vedāntin

attains the same Buddhahood, which is the enlightened knowledge of the self in relation to the universal Self, the wisdom or vijñāna. Neither the Buddha says that he is God, nor Śaṁkara says that his self exists independent of God. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the Buddha's view on the self :

> Buddha clearly tells us what the self is not, though he does not give any clear account of what it is. It is, however, wrong to think that there is no self at all according to Buddha.[1]

The triadic rules of discipline of the Buddhist thought : sīla or conduct, prajña or insight, and samādhi or meditation, for the final experience of nirvāna or liberation are similar to Śaṁkara's four Vedāntic principles of discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal (nityānitya-vastu-viveka), detachment from the pleasure of the non-eternal (ihamūtra-phala-bhoga-virāga), self-control, renunciation, etc. (samadamādi-sādhanā-sampat), and desire for liberation (mumukṣutva). As the Buddha is against the ritualism of the Vedas, so is Śaṁkara against the karma-kāṇḍa or ceremonialism of the Vedas (Pūrva Mīmāṁsā). Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedānta is the knowledge portion or jñāna-kāṇḍa (Uttara Mīmāṁsā) of the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads, which are the end of the Vedas, are more philosophical and less ceremonial. The Upaniṣadic seers like Yājñavalkya, Bharadvāja, Janaka, and Sāndilya discuss more about the life eternal than the pleasure temporal.

Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy according to the Buddha's Middle Path (the Noble Eightfold Path) and Śaṁkara's Vedāntic philosophy are not so much contradictory to each other as complementary in their final results. By the logical method of open discussion, Nāgārjuna tries to clear up the unreal that exists in the minds of the people in guise of the real. Once the unreal is removed,

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* Vol. I (8th Impression ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 386.

there will appear nothing but the real, if there is any. Where Śaṁkara is positive about the self, the base of the real, Nāgārjuna is negative about the phenomenal world of no-self, the world of unreality. Nāgārjuna says that as long as we are finites we will never know the Infinite. Śaṁkara says that we must detach ourselves form the finite Māyā in order to know the inner self, the part of the infinite Self. The Buddhists and the Vedāntins disagree there where the Buddhists deny the Absolute (Brahman) or the Self (Ātman). On this fundamental difference, Śaṁkara comments :

> "The theory (of Buddhism) wears a semblance to the Advaita, but is not that absolutism which is the pivot of the Vedānta philosophy." [2]

Both the Śūnya-vāda or the theory of emptiness of Nāgārjuna and the Advaita-vāda or non-dualism of Śaṁkara have one thing common which is the oneness of the universe. The oneness of Śaṁkara's non-dualism is the Absolute, whereas that of Nāgārjuna's emptiness is the relative. According to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of the pratitya samutpāda or the dependent origination, the world of phenomena has interdependent origin, whereas according to Śaṁkara's Advaitism or non-dualism, the spatio-temporal world is the Māyā, līlā, or sport of Brahman the Supreme.

The Vedānta being the conclusion of the Vedas (vedasya antaḥ) intends to interpret the philosophical reality of the universe and tries to forsake the dogmatic way of thinking. The Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā, which are understood as the trinity or the prasthān traya of Hinduism, have reached through the spiritual experiences of their seers to the conviction that there is one Brahman the Supreme who is formless (nirākāra) and without attributes (nirguṇa), and this world of manifestation is His Māyā or sport. The great Vedāntic

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian philosophy*, Vol. 2, (8th Impression ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 463.

commentators like Saṁkara have also come to this philosophical conclusion that we finites who exist in the Infinite like, to some extent, the parts of a whole can never comprehend the meaning and purpose of this phenomenal existence of the Supreme. This unmoved mover, in the words of Aristotle, who is the cause of the entire movement of the universe is beyond the knowledge of the moved elements. Śaṁkara says that this indefinable (anirvacanīya) Brahman the Absolute can not be ordinarily defined, described, or demonstrated but can be experienced by the realization of one's self. As a result of the self-realization, the avidyā or ignorance of the people regarding the unity in diversity will be cleared-up, and they will see the reality of the world as it is. Thus the Upaniṣadic reality of the Absolute : satyam jñānam anatam brahma, Brahman the Truth, the Consciousness, and the Infinite (T. U. II-I-I), can be realized.

The Bhagavadgītā has presented three fundamental means of karma or action, jñāna or knowledge, and bhakti or devotion to attain the highest, i. e., the liberation, mokṣa, or nirvāṇa. Any of these well-founded yogas done with the formula of niṣkāma or detachment is good enough to attain that spiritual goal of liberation from the world of suffering. The philosophy of the Gītā is aiming to reach the highest here on this earth with the solid method of detached action. The Bhagavadgītā has given enough freedom to the truth-seekers of the different thoughts to call their ultimate Reality by any name—Brahmānanda, Saccidānanda, eternal Bliss, God-realization, self-realization, etc.—and apply any means of karma, jñāna, or bhakti, as long as they are freed from the temporal world of suffering. The Gītā is more particular about the means, mārga, or yoga of the proceeding than the fruit of the proceeding. The good means are sure to bring good fruits, and those means are good which are done dispassionately. Niṣkāma karma or detached action is the foundation of the Gītā's sound means of yoga. After setting the right goal, one must not be lost by the accidental

pleasure or pain before or after the attainment of that goal. In other words, one should not get influenced by the emotion of pleasure or pain at any successful or unsuccessful moment of one's life. The Gītā's expression of "sukhadukha sama kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau. Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat" (B. G. 11-33) is the key to material or spiritual success.

The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path are the central theme of the philosophy of the Buddha. His Trī-Piṭakas or the three Baskets of the Law—Sutta or tales, Vinaya or discipline, and Abhidhamma or doctrine—try to describe the unreality of the temporal world (saṁsāra) and the reality of Nirvāṇa or liberation. The Buddha's Four Noble Truths of suffering (duḥkha), the cause of suffering (samudaya), the removal of suffering (nirōdha), and the remedy of suffering (mārga) through his Noble Eight-fold Path are leading to the same ultimate goal of Nirvāṇa where one is liberated from the sorrow and is able to experience eternal bliss.

Finally, it can be said that both the Absolutism of the Vedānta and the Middle Path of Buddhism denounce the phenomenal world (saṁsāra) as unreal, temporal, indefinable, and advocate the philosophy of mokṣa, nirvāṇa, or liberation. Both the philosophies are aiming at the experience of transcendental reality (ādhyātmika satya) beyond the boundaries of empirical reality (vyāvahāric satya). Liberation from this temporality is their ultimate Reality.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The chronology of the philosophies of the Vedānta and Budhism is pre-historic. Volumnous books and innumerable treatises and articles have been written on them from the days of their beginning. Both the Eastern and the Western commentators and writers have attempted to define and describe the Vedāntic Absolutism and the Buddhist Relativism according to their understanding. Interpretation of these thoughtful subjects varies from commentator to commentator, depending on their philosophical depth and the method of their approach. Many sincere intellectuals of high spiritual esteem and sound literary back-ground like Nāgārjuna, Śaṁkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhva, and others have presented masterpiece interpretations of these great philosophies of everlasting nature and universal character.

Among the medieval Buddhist and Vedāntic thinkers, Nāgārjuna (2nd century A. D.) and Śaṁkara (8th century A. D.) are considered to be the most authoritative and impressive Buddhist and Vedāntic interpretors. Nāgārjuna's dialectic and Śaṁkara's commentaries intend to unveil the revealed reality of the past.

Nāgārjuna's Buddhist philosophy of relativity is best described in his Mahā-Prajñāparamita Sāstra. There Nāgārjuna explains the theory of relativity as taught by the Buddha. His śūnyatā or emptiness shows that the phenomenal things do not have their self-nature. It means that things exist relatively and not absolutely. His both Mādhyamika Kārikā and Vigrahavyāvartanī Kārikā elaborate his phenomenalism dialectically.

The credit of the recognition of the Vedānta as a great philosophy in the world goes to Śaṁkara. His Advaitism or non-dualism brings forth the highest spiritual attainment through the metaphysics of self-realization. Śaṁkara's

best books are his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, the Vedānta Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā. Upadeśasahaśrī and Vivekachudamani reflect his philosophical view in general. His great hymns like Dakṣināmūrti Stōtra, Ānandalaharī and Saundaryalaharī describe the value of human love and life. They all describe the non-duality of the Supreme and the eternity of the Self.

Dr. Radhakrishnan, the great scholar-statesman of the modern India, is the most comprehensive and thoughtful commentator on Indian philosophy. His both the volumes of 'Indian Philosophy' are the masterpiece works on Buddhism and the Vedānta. His interpretation of 'The Principal Upaniṣads,' 'The Bhagavadgītā', 'The Brahma Sūtra', 'The Dhammapada', and others are great asset to the Hindus in particular and the world in general. Dr. Dasgupta's all five volumes of 'A History of Indian Philosophy' are an elaborate description of the Indian thought. Max Müller's volumnous 'Sacred Books of the East' are of great value in relation to the Indian philosophies and religions. Sri Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine' with its spiritual depth is the scientific approach to the Vedic and the Vedāntic philosophies. Swami Nikhilananda's interpretation of the Upaniṣads have great intuitive richness described in simple words. Dr. F. J. Streng's book 'Emptiness' is an impressive explanation of Nāgārjuna's theory of śūnyatā or void, and it makes an effective endeavor to describe the fact that Nāgārjuna's emptiness or śūnyatā is not nothingness but want of self-existence. Dr. T. R. V. Murti's 'The Central philosophy of Buddhism' endeavors to interpret the Mādhya-mika phil osophy of Nāgārjuna's Buddhism in comparison to the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and Bradley. Dr. A. K. Sarkar's 'Changing Phases:of Buddhist Thought', which describes the four schools of Buddhism, has given a significant description of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika view on causality and nirvāṇa in comparison to the philosophy of Whitehead. Dr. K. V. Ramanan's book 'Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Mahā-Prajñaparamitā Śāstra' has very meaningful interpretation of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of śūnyatā.

These are the few important literatures on the vast fields of the Vedānta and Buddhism in relation to the interpretation of the reality in their philosophies. These philosophies have a larger stock of books in many other languages of the world. The English books are very much translations from the original literatures. The richness of the original is always lacking in the translations. However, the subject matter of this thesis is well dealt by these thoughtful works of the well-read philosophers and writers.

Chapter III

ELABORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF REALITY ACCORDING TO THE UPANIṢADS

The philosophy of the Upaniṣads teaches the concept of Supreme Reality. As far as human mind can speculate and intuit, it has discovered the truth of Ultimate Reality in the Upaniṣads. This Ultimate Reality is absolute. This absolutism is the central theme of almost all the Upaniṣads written and commented.

The Absolute of the Upaniṣads is not the void, sūnyatā, or emptiness of Buddhism or any other non-Upaniṣadic philosophy. This Absolute contains great many things. It has meaning and purpose. Itself being one without a second, it consists of the relativity of the multiplicity. This multiplicity or the duality of the universe which we perceive is, as a matter of fact, not many but One Brahman the Absolute. All this is Brahman, sarvam khalv idaṁ brahma, says the Upaniṣads (C. U. 111-14-1). We finites fail to understand the Infinite who is our container and sustainer, within us and without us. This misunderstanding of the Infinite is the paradox which the Upaniṣads and their commentators endeavor to define, describe, and demonstrate to the seekers of Truth.

The seers of the Upaniṣadic truth want the truthseekers to have concentration of mind and purification of soul as a prerequisite in the direction of the quest of Ultimate Reality. This great venture of truth finding is a difficult task. It is not a child's play to move at random. It needs thoughtfulness and preparation. Very few try and very few succeed.

The philosophical understanding of the universe described in the Upaniṣads is the conclusive part of the speculative Veda. The polytheistic approach of the pre-Upaniṣadic Veda has been ritualistic and ceremonial all

along until the great seers like Yājñavalkya, Sañdilya, Bharādwaja, Svetaketu, Arunī, Bālaki, and others discovered the eternal truth of Brahman the Absolute which is the Supreme Reality. It is not the fact that the Supreme Reality did not exist before the Upaniṣads. The eternal Brahman exists beyond time and space, whether we finites know it or not.

This eternal truth of One Brahman—ekam evādvitīyam, one only, without a second (C. U. VI-2-1)—was known and worshipped in the form of various gods and goddesses in the age of the Vedas. The Vedic seekers of truth were very much devoted to the natural powers of the Supreme. More or less, they were acquainted with only the cosmic powers of the universe. The power beyond the cosmos was not clearly discovered until the age of the Upaniṣads. The pre-Upaniṣadic people were very much interested in their immediate gain and loss in this world and heaven and hell hereafter. The worship of fire or Agni, dawn or Usha, rain-god or Indra, sun or Sūrya, etc., were mainly aimed at material prosperity on this earth and heavenly life after death. All these ceremonial performances of the Vedic religion were fruitful temporally. They did not aim at the attainment of anything everlasting. They could not differentiate between the eternity and the temporality, Brahman and Māyā. The pre-Upaniṣadic religion of the Veda is based on ritualism or the karmakāṇḍa, and the Upaniṣadic religion is founded on philosophy or the jñāna-kāṇḍa. The first part is cosmic and the second part is supra-cosmic. The former is polytheistically monistic. Whereas, the latter is pantheistically monistic. These are the fundamental differences between the two parts of the Veda: the Brāhmanās and the Upaniṣads. Thus the Upaniṣads are the development and fulfilment of the traditional truth of Veda. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes in his book 'The Principal Upaniṣads':

> As a part of the Veda, the Upaniṣads, belong to śruti or revealed literature. They are immemorial, sanātana, timeless.

> Their truths are said to be breathed out by God or visioned by the seers. They are the utterances of the sages who speak out of the fullness of their illumined experience.[1]

Though traditionally founded on the orthodox literature of the ancient Veda, the sages of the Upaniṣadic thought are free from all conservative speculations and dogmatic articulations. They have left the door of human mind wide open to travel as high and as deep as possible in the realm of Reality for the best. The students of the Upaniṣads are welcome to interpret the findings of the Veda the way they rationally want. The Upaniṣads say that truth has nothing to do with provincialism and dogmatism. The Reality is not a personal property. It is a universal thing. Whoever seeks it sincerely gets the vision of it because it is all pervading like the air which is accessible to all whoever keep their door open. Taittīriya Upaniṣad says : "satyam jñānam anantam brahma, Brahman is the Truth, the knowledge, the Infinite" (T.U. II-1-1).

From the Upaniṣadic point of view, the ultimate reality is Brahman. Brahman is one, without a second, ekam evādvitīyam (C. U. VI-2-1). Etymologically, Brahman means to grow. It is derived from the root 'brh' which means in Sanskrit 'to grow' or evolve. This Being, which we come from, live in, and return to, is absolutely One, say the seers of the Upaniṣads. This Oneness of the Supreme Reality, Brahman, is the uncontradicted truth of all the Upaniṣads. Brahman is the Reality of the real, satyāsya satyam (B. U. 11-1). There is no subjective or objective interpretation of Brahman in the Upaniṣads. Brahman, the Supreme Reality is beyond the notion of subject and object, time and space, cause and effect. It is inclusive of all phenomena we know and we do not know. It is both immanent and transcendent. The immanent

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads*, (2nd. impression, London; George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 22.

Brahman is known as our ātman or inner self. Dr. Radhakrishnan describes this universality of Brahman:

> Brahman, the first principle of the Universe, is known through ātman, the inner self of man. In the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa and the Chāndogya Upaniṣad it is said: 'Verily this whole world is Brahman,' and also 'This soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahman'. 'That person who is seen in the eye, He is ātman, that is Brahman.' God is both the wholly other, transcendent and utterly beyond the world and man, and yet he enters into man and lives in him and becomes the inmost content of his very existence. [2]

After determining the oneness of this Brahman, the Upaniṣads endeavor to explain the various aspects of it. As we all know that all the philosophies, like the Upaniṣads, are somehow or other, seeking the answers of What ?, Why ?, How ?, and When ? of this universe we compose. From the days of the Veda to the modern time, both in the East and the West, the seekers of truth are trying to understand the mystery behind the entire existence of ours. Why things are born and why do they die ? Where do they come from and where do they go ? What is this all about ? It is not easy to find all the answers of the infinite. We can not know our knower who is the knower and the medium of the knowledge of ours. We can know only some of its finite aspects. Yājñavalkya says about Brahman, the Supreme Self: "neti nety ātmā ; agrhyaḥ, na hi grhyate. Self is not this, not this ; He is incomprehensible for He is never comprehended" (B. U. IV-4-22),

This Brahman is interpreted by the Upaniṣadic seers by two main names: Nirākāra Brahman and Sākāra Brahman. Nirākāra Brahman is considered formless, transcendental, unconditioned, beyond our reach. The

2. Ibid. p. 77

Sākāra Brahman is formed, immanent, conditioned, accessible. Nirākāra Brahman is the Absolute. Whereas, the Sākāra Brahman is relative. The concept of absolutism and relativism, Nirākāra Brahman and Sākāra Brahman is the central theme of all the Upaniṣadic interpretations of the Supreme Reality.

The principal Upaniṣads do not simply search the obscure transcendental truth (paramārthic satya) being indifferent to the empirical truth (vyāvahāric satya). The seers of the Upaniṣads had the understanding of the difference between the Absolute Reality and the relative reality. One is infinite and the other is its finite part. One is the Existence eternal, but the other comes to exist temporally. The Upaniṣads do not say that one is real and the other is unreal. According to the Upaniṣadic concept of the Reality, whatever exists has some reality in it. One that exists momentarily is temporally real, and that which exists permanently is eternally Real.

This eternity and temporality, Nirguṇa (attributeless) Brahman and Saguṇa (with attributes) Brahman, the Absolute and the relative, the transcendent and the immanent, are the truth the Upaniṣads intend to explain. Dr. Radhakrishnan interprets these two aspects of the Supreme Reality :

> Supra-cosmic transcendence and cosmic universality are both real phases of the One Supreme. In the formal aspect the Spirit is in no way dependent on the cosmic manifold; in the latter the Spirit functions as the principle of the cosmic manifold. The supra-cosmic silence and the cosmic integration are both real. The two, nirguṇa and saguṇa Brahman Absolute and God are not different. [3]

The word 'upaniṣad' is derived from upa (near),ni (down), and sad (to sit) which means to sit down near. The students

3. Ibid. p. 64.

of philosophy were asked to sit down near the venerable teacher to learn the secret, mystery or rahasyam of the world. Simple approach to the high goal has immense value.

The date and authorship of the Upaniṣads are not authentic because there are various opinions about them, and it is difficult to confirm any. They are put in 800 to 300 B. C. Some are pre-Buddhistic, and some have been written after the Buddha. Naming and dating of the religious literature have been foreign to ancient India. The sages and seers of those days wanted to have their revealed ideas flow through the ages beyond the limit of time, place, and person. These Upaniṣadic revelations (śṛuti) which were experienced by the ancient seers (draṣṭā) were considered universal truths which do not belong to any particular person or period. They cared for the truth and not for its record. There are about 108 Upaniṣads, and out of these, eleven Upaniṣads have been authoritatively and authentically commented by Śaṁkara, and eighteen Upaniṣads have been interpreted by Radhakrishnan. Following are the most important Upaniṣads commented by Śaṁkara: Bṛhad-arañyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Taittirīya, Īsa, Kena, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, and Svetāśvatara.

This Supreme Reality or Brahman has been understood by the early Upaniṣads as satyam or truth, jñānam or consciousness, and anantam or infinity. The later Upaniṣads call it sat or existence, cit or consciousness, and ānanda or bliss. This Saccidānanda (sat-cit-ānanda) or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, the latest Upaniṣadic discovery of the nature of Brahman, is well accepted and best understood by all the non-dualist and dualist groups of truth-seekers. Srī Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine' calls this Saccidānanda the eternal nature and character of the Supreme.

The idea of Self or Ātman is the positive step towards the realization of that Brahman, the Supreme Reality. The Ātman, the Self, or the soul is the only source of realization of Brahman according to the Upaniṣads. The

Upaniṣads say that the infinite is impossible to be comprehended by our finite mind, One can only intuit it. This intuition or supra-sensible experience of the Absolute is possible only on a sound foundation, and that has to emerge from inside and not from outside. There is no knowledge or gain of any kind without a knower or gainer. There is no Existence-Consciousness-Bliss or Saccidānanda for me if I do not exist, I am not conscious, and I am not blissful.

In the lengthy process of truth-finding, the realization of Self is the primary step in the Upaniṣads. This self-realization is the forward march to know its immortality, and the knowledge of this immortal self leads him to understand and believe that this individual self is nevertheless the part of the whole eternal Self. After the knowledge of the part and the whole, individual self and the universal Self, Brahman and Ātman, one should not have any other goal than to have the union of the two, Brahmātmaikyam.

By knowing the oneness of Ātman and Brahman, individual self and universal Self, one should firmly believe that Ātmajñāna is Brahmajñāna and the self-realization is the Self-realization. This Ātmajñāna is not an intellectual knowledge or sense-perception. It is subtler than intellect and senses. It can be attained only through intuition which is supra-sensible experience. The Upaniṣad explains the inexplicability of this subtle Brahman-knowledge :

> yasyāmatam tasya matam matam yasya
> na veda saḥ
> avijñātaṁ vijānatam vijñātam
> avijānatām (Kenn II-3)
>
> To Whomsoever it is not known, to him it is known; to whomsoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it ; it is understood by those who do not understand it. [4]

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4. Ibid. p. 595.

With the positivity of the self or the Ātman, which is the immanent Brahman, the Upaniṣadic seers (draṣṭā) have tried to understand the Nirguṇa Brahman who is Nirākāra (formless) and Saguṇa Brahman who is Sākāra (with form). One is never going to understand either the absolute Brahman (Nirākāra) or the relative Brahman (Sākāra) without the concept of his inner soul or Ātman, say the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣadic ultimate Reality is realized from inside and not from outside, Dr. Radhakrishnan describes this spiritual understanding of the Upaniṣads in his Indian Philosophy (Vol. I):

> In the Upaniṣads we find a return to the fresh springs of spiritual life. They declare that the soul will not obtain salvation by the performance of sacrifices. It can be obtained only by the truly religious life, based on an insight into the heart of the universe. Perfection is inward and spiritual, not outward and mechanical. We can not make a man clean by washing his shirt.[5]

Outside, as Śaṁkara has described, is nothing but Brahman's indescribable Māyā, This Māyā, Śakti, or Prakṛiti is Brahman's power which no one knows except Brahman, and therefore, says Śaṁkara, one should just try to realize his own self which is the part of the universal Self, Brahman. This individual self is the only entity which remains unchanged throughout its course from the beginning to the end. Everything else comes and goes before our eyes except the permanent self which remains the same in all three waking, sleeping, and dreaming states of our consciousness. The Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad describes the immortal nature of the self :

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (8th impression ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 147.

> "When the sun has set, Yājñavalkya, and the moon has set, and the fire has gone out and speech has stopped, what light does a person here have?" "The self, indeed, is his light," said he, "for with the self, indeed, as the light, one sits, moves about, does one's work and returns."[6]

The realization of the particular self is the realization of the universal Self. The Upaniṣads say: tat tvam asi, Thou art That (C. U. VI-8-7); and aham brahmāsmiti, I am Brahman (B. U. 1-4-10). These statements of the Upaniṣads strengthen the idea of the universality of the Self. The entire Īs'a Upaniṣad has been written to explain the truth of Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātmaikyam as the ultimate goal of mankind. Sat-cit-Ananda or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss has been considered as the eternal nature of the Supreme. This Supreme Brahman, is beyond the spatio-temporal causality. That does nor mean that Brahman is indifferent to these relative functions of cause and effect, action and reaction. He includes all these phenomenal activities. Śri Aurobindo writes on this relativity of the Absolute in his book 'The Life Divine':

> The Supreme Brahman is that which in Western metaphysics is called the Absolute; but Brahman is at the same time the omnipresent Reality in which all that is relative exists as its forms or its movements; this is an Absolute which takes all relativities in its embrace. The Upaniṣads affirm that all this is the Brahman. Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman.[7]

6. S. Radhakrihnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd. impression; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 255.

7. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine* (3rd ed.; New York; Indian Library Society, 1965), pp. 381-385.

The early Upaniṣads believe that Brahman does not come to exist from any outside source of non-Being. This "satyam jñānam anantam brahman, Brahman the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinite" (T. U. II-1-1) is ever existing in manifested or unmanifested form. It is never born, and it never dies. It is a scientific truth that nothing will come out of something that does not exist. Being is ever existing, and non-Being is always the absence of Being. This birth is the becoming or the appearance of Being, and the death is its disappearance. The same Being appears in various manifestations with us and in us. After a certain period of time, there comes the end of all the manifestations, and Being or Brahman goes back to his unmanifested state. Dr. Radhakrishnan describes the becoming of Being :

> Birth is a becoming of the Supreme in the cosmic being. This becoming is not inconsistent with Being. It becomes a means and not an obstacle to the enjoyment of life eternal. To be released from the chain of birth and death is not to flee from the world of becoming. Bondage does not consist in the assumption of birth or individuality, but in the persistence of the ignorant sense of the separate, selfish ego.[8]

This cyclic order of the universe with its two main phases of appearances and disappearances is being done harmoniously by Brahman for His own purpose. It is his lilā or Māyā. The philosophical interpretation of this wordly game is the speculation of the Upaniṣadic seers. This Creation is the recreation of the Creator Brahman who does so independent of everything, even His dependents. Taittirīya Upaniṣad says that Brahman was one, and He decided to be many, to be born, so kāmayata, bahu saym prajāyeyeti (T. U. 11-6-1). This evolution and involution of Brahman is a revolutionary process which

8. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads,* (2nd impression ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 127.

is infinite. The Upaniṣads say that the finites can not measure it. Śrī Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine' explains the same physical and metaphysical truth of cyclic evolution and involution of the Supreme Reality.

After knowing the sat-cit-ānanda or Existence-Conciousness-Bliss as the eternal nature of Brahman, the Upaniṣads endeavor to introduce ways and means to attain that. They have searched and found great many ways to go there. All the ways toward liberation, mukti, or nirvāṇa are categorized into two main groups; one is called sādyōmukti or instantaneous release, and the other is called krama-mukti or gradual liberation. The pre-Upaniṣadic Veda emphasizes krama-mukti or the gradual liberation of the soul through rituals. Ceremonial sacrifices, chanting of the Vedic hymns, feasting, drinking soma, etc., were the means to attain liberation from this world. Whereas, the Upaniṣadic phase of the Veda puts stress on the sādyōmukti or immediate release. Though the end justifies the means, yet the early attainment of the goal is better than the late. Non-dualist Vedāntin Śaṁkara is the believer of the sādyōmukti, and the dualists and qualified-non-dualists like Madhava, Ballava, and Rāmānuja are the advocates of the krama-mukti.

The karma-kāṇda or the ritualistic system of the four Vedas had remained nothing more than a set of rules for the attainment of material gain here and heavenly life hereafter. These priestly ceremonies of the chanting of the mantras and the performing of sacrifices on the deities were so lengthy and dogmatic that it failed to bear any fruit, mental or physical, worldly or heavenly. It had almost lost its fervour of concentration of mind, physical discipline, sacrificial tendency, and faith in the supernatural power of the Divine. The ceremonial Vedic system deteriorated to orthodoxism and dogmatism. The religious process in that period had become more mechanical and less organic. Henrich Zimmer writes about the Upaniṣadic philosophers in his book 'Philosophies of India':

> THE CREATIVE philosophers of the period of the Upanisads, examining the problem of the atman, were the pioneer intellectuals and free-thinkers of their age. They stepped beyond the traditional priestly view of the cosmos. Yet, as we have seen, they went beyond it without dissolving or even criticizing it; for the sphere in which they delved was not the same as that which the priests had monopolized.[9]

The Upaniṣadic religion is more organic and less mechanical. It is less material (bhoutic) and more spiritual (ādhyātmic). The physical discipline in the Upaniṣads is a preparation for the spiritual flight. Matter is not meaningless in the Upaniṣads. It is the base to stand on for the spiritual growth. The inhabitants of this world who are composed of material and non-material elements can not neglect their material parts. The Upaniṣads teach to abide by both physical and metaphysical laws, cosmic and supra-cosmic principles, to attain the highest. The Supreme Reality includes both the cosmic and supra-cosmic realities. Thus the Hindu Dharma commands both the ethical and spiritual values to be taken into consideration for the sure success on the path of liberation, mukti, or nirvāṇa.

The Brahmānanda or the bliss of Brahman-Ātman-Unity (Brahmātmaikyam) is the ultimate goal of mankind, and this transcendental experience is the final state of empirical experiences which are stage by stage guided to reach that Ultimate. Ethical laws or the dharmas of the Hindus are set by both pre-Upaniṣadic and Upaniṣadic Vedas to make the spiritual path easier in order to come to the end of this mundane journey quicker.

From the Vedic point of view, Brahmacarya or physical

9. Henrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India,* ed. Joseph Campbell (3rd printing; New Jersey University Press, 1967), pp. 355-356.

control and spiritual learning, gārahasthya or household duties, vānaprasthya or forest life, and saṁnyās or the renunciation are the four well founded stages and periods of human life which successfully lead a person to the ultimate Reality of Brahman-knowledge. One has to give up his emotional desires (kāma), anger (krōdha), greed (lōbha), attachment (mōha), and pride (ahaṁkāra), and he will have to perform the duties (dharmas) of his particular stage with self-restraint (dama), self-sacrifice (dāna), and compassion (dayā). Going through all these processes with faith (śradhā) and energy (śakti) is a sure success towards the ultimate goal. This is the karma-kāṇḍa system or the gradual process of liberation or mokṣa.

In order to reach the last stage of renunciation or saṁnyās, one needs to practice unfatigued the fundamental principles of detachment. Detachment from this world is the basic method of the Vedānta for the realization of the Supreme. No spiritual achievement is possible without the detachment from the material world. It is called niṣkāma-karma-yoga in the Gītā. God-vision (brahma-śākṣātkāra) is possible only through the detached world-vision. If one is involved in the world, he can not see the evolution of the world and that which is beyond. Transcendental experience is beyond phenomenal experience. For that sake, śravana or hearing, manana or reflection, and nididhyāsana or contemplation are needed. One must sincerely listen to the seers' sayings or upadeśa (Upaniṣads, Gīta, and so on), reflect those sayings psycho-physically, and contemplate on the truth for the perfection. In other words, one must be either a good reformer or a good follower. Blind faith is never recommended by the Upaniṣads. Like the teachings of the Buddha, the Upaniṣads teach the idea of understanding before believing. Faith or sradhā is always fallible without understanding.

The history of mankind says that everybody can not be a reformer, avatāra, divine incarnation, or prophet who does not need any karma-kāṇḍa or the traditional processes to go through for the highest achievement, but everybody can be

a good follower of the teachings of the realized teachers. One attains the same truth either by following the truthful teaching or by teaching the truth. A good follower is as good as his teacher. The Buddha, Socrates, Christ, Śaṁkara, and Ramakrishna were as good as Nāgārjuna, Plato, Aquinas, Sureśwara, and Vivekananda. The finding of the Truth and the interpreting of the discovered Truth reach the same goal. Revealing the Reality and unveiling the revealed Reality attain the same summit.

Saṁnyās or renunctiation is the final stage for liberation, mokṣa, or nirvāna. There is no return from here to the world of time and space against one's will. Herefrom one attains the eternity. Here one is either in sa-bikalpa-samādhi or nir-vikalpa-samādhi. In the sa-bikalpa-samādhi the seeker has some deified object or Iṣta-devatā in his mind like that of Rāmānuja's Nārāyaṇ and Ramakrishna's Kali. In the nir-vikalpa-samādhi like that of Śaṁkara or the Buddha, there is the experience of self-realization of Ātmajñāna. This supra-sensible experience is called intuition of the transcendent. It is beyond phenomenal determination and, therefore, hard to be explained. This is the highest achievement of human life. Words are inadequate to explain this state except in the words of Brahmānanda, Saccidānanda, satyam-śivam-sundaram, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

Bṛhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad: The Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad is considered to be the most important Upaniṣad of all. It has been most elaborately described by Śaṁkara in his Upaniṣadic commentary and by Dr. Radhakrishnan in his 'The Principal Upaniṣads'. I shall try to give here some most significant parts of this Upaniṣad in relation to its interpretation of the Supreme Reality.

This Upaniṣad belongs to Satapath Brāhmaṇa. It is divided into three kāṇḍas or sections. (I) The Madhu kāṇḍa is a philosophical teaching, upadeśa. It teaches the basic identity between the individual self and the Universal Self. (2) The Yājñavalkya or the Muni kāṇḍa deals with the logical justification of manana of the teaching. (3) The

Khila kāṇḍa deals with the mode of worship and meditation or upāsana for the attainmeat of the spiritual goal. In other words, listening (sravaṇa), reflecting (manana), and meditating (niddyāsana) are necessary for understanding and realizing the Ultimate.

Literally, the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaiṣad means the 'great forest Upaniṣad'. According to Śaṁkara, it is the highest knowledge ever attained in the peaceful atmosphere of the forest. Like other Upaniṣads this Upaniṣad too deals with the philosophy of Ātman and Brahman and the creation of the universe. It expounds that the ultimate Reality of Ātmajñāna or self-realization is the same as the Brahmajñāna or Brahman realization. Śaṁkara has divided this Upaniṣad into six parts which are grouped into forty-seven chapters, and they are called Brāhmaṇas as they deal with nothing but Brahman, the empirical reality and the transcendental Reality. The meaning behind the spiritual treatise and the dialogue between the king Janaka and the Maharśi Yājñavalkya is the understanding of the truth, and the purpose behind that understanding is the realization of the truth.

The authority of the Vedas is primary, and, therefore, this Upaniṣad starts with some Vedic rituals like the aśvamedha-jajña or horse sacrifice for progress and prosperity. Afterwards, the Brahmā or the Hiraṇya-garbha was created as the world-soul (platonic nous). This Hiraṇya-garbha practiced various austerities (tapas) or sacrifices to give name (nāma), form (rūpa), and action (śakti) to the various becomings of Being. This Hiraṇya-garbha, who is also called Prajāpati or the Lord of the subjects, then went on creating the gods, the demons, the sun, the moon, the earth, the air, the water, the sky, the life, the mind, and other material elements with the intention of making many becomings out of one Being, many selves out of One self. The Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad talks about the Creation (B. U. 1-4-1):

> In the beginning this (world) was only
> the self, in the shape of a person. Looking

> around he saw nothing else than the self. He first said, 'I am'. Therefore arose the name of I. Therefore, even to this day when one is addressed he says first 'This is I' and then speaks whatever other name he may have.[10]

According to the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, it is thus clear that the unmanifested Brahman (Nirākāra Brahman) was the only existing thing, and there was no manifested world. "Brahman, indeed, was this in the beginning, brahma vā idam agra āsīt" (B.U. 1-4-10). "As Brahman was alone, He had no delight ; He desired a second. sa vai naiva reme ; tasmād ekākī na ramate ; sa dvitīyam aicchat" (B. U. 1-4-3). Brahman the Supreme then created Brahmā the first Person, and this first Person then created the creatures out of two male and female, active and passive forces. Every culture of the world has its own way of interpreting the Creation of the Almighty. According to the Bible, God created Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden apple which led to the creation of the world of good and evil. These are the mythological understandings and interpretations of this manifestation, the Creation.

The human society, the best of the creation, was divided. according to the law of Manu, into four castes or groups on the basis of individuals' ability and capacity. They were the Brāhmins, the priestly or teaching class ; the Kṣatrīyas, the warrior or ruling class ; the Vaiśyas, the trading class ; and the Śūdras, the unskilled class. The life of each individual was divided into four stages to go through in order to get the best out of this temporal world and the world hereafter. They are Brahmacarya or the learning stage, Gārahasthya or the householders' stage, Vānaprasthya or the forest life, and the Saṁnyās or the renounced life. These personal stages and social divisions were the best thought-out and well-established laws or dharmas for the human beings according to the Upaniṣads. These are eternal laws

10. S. Radhakrsihnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd impression : London : George Allen & Unwin, 1968). p. 163.

applicable universally. These personal and social divisions are based on one's age and aptitude. As the vitality and mentality change with the age, so a man should change his way of living as he grows older. Each age has a different role to play. A child must play a child's part, and a grown-up must play a grown-up's part. At the end of life, everyone has entirely a different role to play.

The same is with the society which is composed of the people of different ability and capacity, guṇa and karma. A good society must take into consideration the adjustment of its various elements for the best of all. As the human body continues to exist in the coordination and cooperation of its head, heart, stomach, and feet, so the human society progresses on the mutuality of its teaching class, ruling class, trading class, and, last but not the least, unskilled class. The entire individual and social system will collapse if any of their four elements fails to cooperate. They must function in harmony for the best of all. The Republic of Plato describes the same socio-personal science. Plato's idea of philosopher-king and mentalized man is for a sound society and a dignified personality. Plato like Upaniṣadic Janaka, Yājñavalkya, and Manu did not seek the transcendent by neglecting the empirical. They connected both for the best here and the ultimate Reality hereafter. Unless and until one is extraordinary or prophetic in his mission on this earth like the Buddha, Christ, Śaṁkara, or Ramakrishna, one must not deny the traditional system of individual stages and social divisions. This is the best way to have personal progress and social unity in this world of diversity.

Brahman is infinite. We finites make up to know him. Only He can explain the truth behind our guesses, speculations, and findings. But, as we know, the Infinite does not need to disclose Its mystery of the Creation to the finites. A finite is like a jar of water in the ocean of water, a candle light in the day light. They become one when they meet together, and there remains nothing phenomenal to explain thereafter. The same way an individual self or Ātman becomes one with the Supreme Self or Brahman after

meeting together or knowing each other, The so-called duality is gone. The great seers like Janaka, Yājñavalkya, Buddha, Christ, Śaṁkara, snd Ramakrishna realized the Truth and become one with it. They have tried to explain to us, but it is impossible to understand the closeness of God by remaining separate from Him. We will realize the Truth in the process of Truth-finding as shown by the great seers.

Thus the entire Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad tries to explain the unmanifested Brahman behind the manifested world. Brahman is the beginning, the middle, and the end. Both visible and invisible belong to one Supreme. The Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad explains the two forms of Reality :

> dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe,
> mūrtaṁ caivamūrṭaṁ ca,
> martyaṁ cāmrtaṁ ca, sthitaṁ ca,
> yac ca, sac ca, tyac ca. (B.U. II-3-1)
>
> Verīly, there are two forms of Brahman, the formed and the formless mortal and the immortal, the unmoving and the moving, the actual (existent) and the true (being).[11]

In order to identify oneself with the universal Self, the Upaniṣads try to regard each and every empirical reality as the part of the Supreme Reality. Our Ātman is the immanent Brahman, We must not neglect any part of our body or any state of our consciousness. All the dreaming, waking, and illumined states of our consciousness must be in the direction of Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātma-ikyam. In order to know the Universal Self, the individual self will have to go beyond the limits of time and space. He will have to universalize the formed reality, the domain of Saguṇa Brahman (Brahman with attributes). He will have to visualize Brahman in all the material and

11. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd impression London : George Allen & Uhwin, 1968), pp. 192-193.

non-material elements. He will consider food as Brahman ; the earth, water, air, sun, and sky which grow food are Brahman ; the eater of that food is Brahman. This universal or pantheistic outlook of Brahman will help the individuals to free themselves from the limitations of sex, race. nationality, and religion. The tendency is to go from the gross parts of our material life to the fine part of spiritual bliss. The highest truth is in the finest, and, therefore, we should move from physical to vital, vital to mental, mental to intellectual, and finally intellectual to the blissful. The sacred Gāyatrī verse of the Ṛg Veda is the sacred verse of this Upaniṣed too for the same goal of inspiring the individuals to go from gross to fine, low to high. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the value of worshiping the gross for the subtle :

> The Gāyatrī (or Sāvitrī) is a sacred verse of the R. V. It reads : tat savitur varenyam, bhargo devasya dhimahi, dhiyo yō nah, pracodayāt : 'We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun ; may he inspire our intelligence.[12]

This way the six chapters of this Upaniṣad are devoted to explain the oneness behind the multiplicity, unity in diversity. The endeavor to remove the misunderstanding between the Ātman, the individual self, and Brahman, the universal Self. They intend to unify the empirical reality with the transcendental Reality. They have described ways and means to attain the ultimate goal of Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātmaikyam. Swami Nikhilananda concludes his introduction of the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad like this :

> The utter oneness of Ātman and Brahman is the most significant contribution of Yājñavalkya to the philosophic thought of India. Brahman is the Reality

12. Ibid. p. 299.

behind the universe, and Ātman the Reality behind the individual.[13]

Chāndogya Upaniṣad: The Chāndogya Upaniṣad like other Upaniṣads, deals with Brahman, the Supreme Reality ; Ātman, the self ; and the method of their unity. The Chāndogyo Upaniṣad belongs to the Sāma Veda which contains Chāndogya Upaniṣad. This Upaniṣad is broadly divided into two sections. The first section mainly deals with the upāsana or the ritualistic worship. The second section explains the Vedāntic philosophy of tat tvam asi or That thou art (C.U. VI-8-7). Śaṁkara's non-dualism or advait-vāda is fundamentally based on the Chāndogya Upaniṣad's enlightening verses like: "ekam evādvitīyam, one only without a second (C.U. VI-2-1), sarvam khalv idaṁ brahma, Verily, this whole world is Brahman (C.U. III-14-1), and tat tvam asi, That thou art (C.U. VI-8-7)."

One should not get confused between the upāsanā or worship of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and the orthodoxial karma-kāṇḍa or the ritualism of the pre-Upaniṣadic Veda. The chanting of the mantras and the ceremonial sacrifices were, as a matter of fact, a preparatory process for the attainment of the best here and hereafter. This karma kāṇḍa was denounced by the Vedāntins not because it was illusory or unrealistic but because it had deteriorated in the society to such a level that it was altogether impossible to reach the Reality through it. That Vedic ceremonialism was less organic and more mechanical. The idea of mansā-vācā-karmanā or mental-oral-physical worship or upāsanā had almost disappeared from the pre-Upaniṣadic system.

The Upaniṣadic worship or upāsanā puts life into the religious system. It vitalizes the mind and mentalizes the life, in the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan. The devotees or bhaktas are asked to have physical fitness and mental equilibrium as the basic requirement for the realization of their spiritual or supra-mental goal. The idea is to move

13. Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanisads*, Section 3 (London : Phoenix House Ltd., 1957), p. 75.

from the gross matter to the subtle spirit, and, therefore, physical control, purification of heart, and concentration of mind are set as requisites.

There are various methods of this psycho-physical preparation for the highest spiritual achievement. The upāsanā or worship of any symbol or pratīka with a superimposed idea of Brahman the Supreme is an empirical means to the transcendental end. The formless Brahman or Nirākāra Brahman can be meditated upon only through some form or symbol. 'Aum' has been considered by the Vedic seers as the best accepted symbol to meditate on for the concentration of mind and purification of soul. The sound of 'aum' has a rhythmic vibration which has physical, mental, and environmental effect. The chanting of the syllable 'aum', meditating on the syllable 'aum', visualizing the syllable 'aum', and initiating every act with the syllable 'aum' have extraordinary effect. That is the reason why all Vedic rites and acts are initiated with 'aum'. "The syllable aum is all this, auṁkāra evedam sarvam" (C.U. 11-23-3). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the meaning of the syllable 'aum' :

> The syllable aum, with which every recital of the Vedic chants begins, is here represented as the symbol of the Supreme and therefore the means of the meditation of the Supreme.........Any name may raise us to perfect contemplation. We start with prayer, we pass on to meditation. When the discursive acts cease, we have contemplation. The Upanishad opens with this instruction to concentrate on the syllable aum, to draw our thoughts away from all other subjects, to develop ekāgratā or one-pointedness.[14]

The worship of any physical substance like the sun, moon, earth, water, fire, air, etc., or any metaphysical entity

14. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd impression, London : 'George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 337.

like the vision or sound of the 'aum' with the superimposed idea of Brahman is the symbolic worship or upāsana of Brahman the Supreme. These psycho-physical disciplines (Brahmacarya) and meditation (upāsana) are required to win the good-evil forces which are perpetually fighting in all human beings like the 'devāsura saṁgrām' or the 'god-demon fight'.

The last section of this Upaniṣad teaches the Vedāntic truth of Self, immanent Brahman. This is the jñāna-kāṇḍa or the knowledge part of the Veda. Here the stress is put on the knowledge of Brahman, the universal Self, without which no knowledge is perfect, The knowledge of all the sciences, arts, commerce, and so on is incomplete without the knowledge of the supreme Self. The knowledge of the Supreme Self can be attained by no other means than by the realization of one's own self. The happiness of the self-realization is the eternal bliss of the Infinite. The Upaniṣad says: "yo vai bhūmā tat sukham, nālpe sukham asti, bhūmaiva sukham. The infinite is happiness. There is no happiness in anything small (finite). Only the infinite is happiness" (C.U. VII-23-1). The Infinite which is above, below, behind, beyond, and within can be best experienced by experiencing one's own self. The Upaniṣad has explained magnificently the sameness of the self-realization and the philosophical dialogue between Nārada and Sanatkumār.

Aitareya Upanishad: Aitareya Upaniṣad is the part of the Ṛg Veda. It is composed of three parts. Each part deals with some kind of reality, either temporal or eternal. The spatio-temporal reality is called the Māyā of Brahman the Absolute.

Like the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Aitareya Upaniṣad explains in brief the process of the Creation. First two parts deal with the Creation and the Creator, and the third part describes the Supreme Self.

In the beginning there was nothing but one Self or Being. He simple desired to be many, and He became many. The Upaniṣad begins with the verse: "ātmā vā

idam eka evāgra āsīt, nānyat kiñ cana misat. sa aikṣata lokān nu srjā iti. The self, verily, was (all) this, one only, in the beginning. Nothing else whatsoever winked. He thought, 'let me now create the worlds' " (A. U. 1-1-1). Thus the creation started. Cosmic elements of name and form were created. Males and females were created for the living beings, and human body and mind were formed for the dwelling of the human soul or Ātma.

The Upaniṣad expounds the inevitability of death for all that are born. Ātman alone, which is the finest of all and deepest in the body, lives beyond birth and death. This subtle part of ours is manifested in our intelligence which can lead us to the highest goal of eternal bliss. The concept of mind is the best creation of God in man. Physically and vitally a man is more or less like a four-footed animal. It is the thinking power of mind that puts man above all the creatures of the world. It is difficult to say whether this attribute of mind is a gift or reward, but there is no doubt to believe that man is fortunate enough to be attributed by the faculty of mind. The best is he who enlightens his mind to the point of Supermind which is high above the limit of human mind. Śrī Aurobindo has elaborated the power of mind and Supermind in his book 'The Life Divine':

> Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops. By the Idea it develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity. It differentiates them, but it does not divide. 15

Like the Upaniṣadic Aurobindo, there are great many Western idealists who have based their philosophy on mentalism. From ancient Plato's Idealism to the modern mentalism of Berkeley, Hume, and Nietzsche, the unfathomoble

15. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Devine* (New York : Indian Library Society, 1965) p. 152.

depth and immeasurable power of human mind are the best attributes we know of. It will not be improper to consider this faculty inferior to none except to that of the Supreme.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad: The Taittirīya Upaniṣad is the part of the Yajur Veda. It is roughly divided into three parts which are called Vallis. The first part is called Śikṣā Valli, and it is the science of phonetics and pronunciation. The second part is called Brahmānanda Valli, and it expounds the eternal bliss of Brahman-knowledge. The third is described as the Bhṛgu Valli, the philosophical teaching of the saint Bhṛgu.

The accuracy and preciseness are the fundamentals of the Upaniṣadic and pre-Upaniṣadic Veda. The chanting of the Mantras was supposed to be with exact rhythm, meter, and pronunciation for the sake of attaining the intended material and spiritual results. There were calculated formulas for the desired goals. Analogically, one can relate the mathematical accuracy of the modern computer science with that of Vedic recitation of the Mantras. Both aim at the same calculated exactness. Little slip of finger or memory will bring a disastrous result in the computer system. So it was done in the mispronunciation of the Upaniṣadic meditative symbols. The pre-designed objective or subjective symbols prescribed by the experienced Vedic seers had to be meditated upon with the correctness of the pronunciation, period, and position. Phonetically, little carelessness of the tongue will pronounce, 'Rāma', the God, as 'Marā', the death, and 'God' as 'dog'. Our modern age of advanced technology has proved the importance of the accuracy of time and the suitability of place.

Thus the phonetics plays a significant part in all Indian languages from the days of the Veda to the modern age. All the languages derived from Sanskrit are phonetical. The pronunciation and the spelling go together.

Other two parts of this Upaniṣad deal with the philosopical view point. The Brahmānanda, the bliss of the Supreme, is our ultimate goal. Brahman is the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinity, satyam jñānam anantam brhma

(T.U. II-1-1). All one needs is the purification of soul and concentration of mind either through the syllable 'aum' or through any other object which would be his audio-visual and psycho-physical target day and night. The inner self which is covered by the five sheaths (panca-koṣa)—food or anna, life or prāna, mind or manas, intelligence or vijñāna, and bliss or ānanda—should try to move from the gross to the subtle, from the material to the spiritual. The highest a self has attained is the spiritual bliss, the ānanda of Ātmajñāna, the Brahmānanda. This is the richest of all experiences. Dr. Radhakrishnan has described the Brahmānanda or the eternal bliss in his book 'The Principal Upaniṣads' "

> The bliss or delight which knowledge of Brahman occasions baffles all description. It is something completely incomprehensible. Brahman thus is blissful being and so is of the highest value. In reaching the richest of being of Brahman we reach our highest fulfillment.[16]

I have described in brief the gist of four main Upaniṣads. The remaining Upaniṣads are as valuable as the ones I have summarized, but as they interpret the same philosophy of Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātmaikyam, self-realization or Ātmajñāna, I consider it reasonable to exclude them from the individual description and thus prevent unnecessary repetition of the thought.

Finally, as the Upaniṣads are the conclusion of the Vedas, so the concept of omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient Brahman is the conclusion of the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads say that "Brahman is the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinity, satyam jñānam anantam brahma'' (T.U. II-1). The Upaniṣads also say that 'Thou art That, tat tvam asi' (C.U. VI-1). In this oneness of the world, the individual self is nothing but the universal Self that pervades all over, and, therefore, the self-realization is the Brahman-realization, the Ultimate Reality.

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16. S. Radhakrishnan. *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd impression; George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 552

Chapter IV

ELABORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF REALITY ACCORDING TO THE BUDDHA

Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.) was the real seeker of Truth. His very name the Buddha signifies in Sanskrit the man of wisdom. The man of wisdom is he who has not only known the Truth but has realized the Truth. A wise man is a practical man. He not only simply stocks in his mind the theoretical knowledge of all the books of the library but practically applies them in his daily life for the best. A wise man is he who does not accept the truth on its face value, whether it is told by a person or a religious text. First of all he will try to know and understand the truth, and then he will experience it in his daily life. After his mind is logically convinced by his personal experience, he will confirm that knowledge as the truth. Thereon his faith on his realized truth is firm like a mountain and calm like an ocean. The Buddha says about the wise man in his Dhammapada :

> selo yathā ekaghano vātena na
> samīrati
> evaṁ nindāpasaṁsāsu na samiñjanti
> paṇḍitā (81).

> As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, so wise men are not moved amidst blame and praise.[1]

Practical application of the theoretical knowledge for the highest utility is the wisdom of a true seeker of Truth. Gautama Buddha was a wise man of that level. Such a pragmatic approach of the Buddha led the people then and now on the path of Reality against superstition or mere

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada* (London : Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 85.

speculation. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on the pragmatism of the Buddha :

> His method is that of psychological analysis. He endeavoured to rid himself of all illegitimate speculation, build from the raw material of experience, and assist the spiritual growth of suffering humanity by an honest and unbiased expression of the results of his thought and experience. According to him, "If a man sees things as they really are, he will cease to pursue shadows and cleave to the great reality of goodness."[2]

Gautama Buddha is so called because he was in true sense wisdom in person. He was neither a dogmatic nor a sceptic. He neither accepted nor denied dogmatically any traditional faith or philosophy. He searched the Truth deep into the Vedic religion and the Upaniṣadic philosophy. Unlike other preceding thinkers, the Buddha, himself a Hindu, deed not go blindly for the Upaniṣadic Truth of Brahman the Absolute. Being a detached seeker of Truth, unbiased to any reason or religion, free from any presuppositions and superstitions, the Buddha discovered his own individual way of reaching the highest. His goal was to reach the Reality and not to either form or reform any religion. He was a pure scientific thinker who wanted to understand and interpret the natural phenomena rationally without any religious or non-religious interference. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the scientific approach of the Buddha towards the Reality :

> In this matter Buddha is at one with the modern scientists, who are of opinion that the idea of supernatural interference should not be introduced into the logical interpretation of natural phenomena. Bud-

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I London ; George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 360.

> dha had so firm grip of the connectedness of things that he would not tolerate miraculous interferences of the cosmic order or magical disturbances of mental life.[3]

Gautama the Buddha was born in 563 B.C. near the ancient town of Kapilavastu on the border of Nepal. His name was Siddhārtha which literally meant the one who has accomplished his aim. His father's name was Suddodana and mother's name was Māyā. He inherited a kingdom whose name was Sākya Kingdom, and, therefore, he is also called Sākya muni. His mother died when he was only seven days old, and he was brought up by Suddhodan's second wife Mahayapati. He was married to Yasodharā and had a son by the name of Rāhula who later became his disciple. There is a legendary story about the Buddha that a fortune teller told his father at his birth that this newly born child would either be a great emperor or a great spiritul leader. Hence his royal father used all possible means to make his only son a great emperor, but the prince was destined to be a spiritual leader. Once it so happened that the prince saw a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and a saintly man outside his pompous palace. The pathetic sight of these changing stages of a man touched the human heart of the prince, and, consequently, one night, leaving his infant son and beautiful wife in the palace, Siddhārtha left his palace and renounced the world in search of the Reality.

The temporality of the world, the changing phases of the mortal beings, and the frustration of life shook the entire personality of the Buddha. They changed the direction of his life, and he did not want to be the part of this human mockery. This miserable life of suffering and decay was intolerable to him. He did not renounce the material world as a coward or a beggar but as a seeker of Truth. He had a purpose, and that was to search the meaning of this life. He did not leave the comfort and luxury of his kingdom to

3. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. I. (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 359.

explore or invent anything material. The hardship of the forest and travelling, which put him many times on the verge of starvation and collapse, was not for any show or revenge but for the cure of the suffering world. The Buddha could not stand the suflering of the people. The world of suffering or duḥkha was not real for him. He set out in search of permanent cure (nirōdha) of the suffering or duḥkha.

In search of Truth or Light, which the Buddha called the cure of suffering, the Buddha met all types of people. He consulted the sages, the learned, and the seats of learning all around the country to get the permanent remedy of the human suffering. He went through all mental and physical restraints and liberties to attain the highest. The legendary attack of Mārā or the worldly temptations had tried to put hindrance in his mission persistently until he realized the Truth, Nirvāṇa. This Truth of Nirvāṇa was the spiritual Light that illumined him. The darkness of the temporal world was gone for him. The unreality of the universe was cleared up and the suffering was permanently cured for Siddhārtha. Gautama became the Buddha, the Enlightened One. He experienced Nirvāṇa, Mokṣa, or Liberation. On the Enlightenment of the Buddha, Edwin Arnold writes in his "Light of Asia":

Our Lord attained Abhidjna—insight
vast.
Ranging beyond this sphere to spheres
unnamed.
System on system, countless worlds
and suns
Moving in splended measures, hand
by hand
Linked in division, one yet separate,
The silver islands of a sapphire
sea
Shoreless, unfathomed, undiminished,
stirred

With waves which roll in restless
tides of change.[4]

Gautama Buddha attained the height of Nirvāṇa (Nibbāna in Pālī). This Nirvāṇa, which literally means the "dying out" or "blowing away." or "extinction like that of a fire" was the Highest, the Truth, the ultimate Reality, the Buddha reached after so many years of his undeviating quest from the days of his awakening to the days of his Enlightenment. The Buddha became a mendicant (paribrājaka) in search of Truth without any pre-condition or superstition. As he was fed up with the tradition, the Buddha did not set any goal before him to attain, because he did not know what to attain. He was in search of the remedy of the suffering which he slightly experienced at the sight of the changing phases of the human body. The difficult period of his unfatigued search culminated in the indescribable experience of Nirvāṇa. His suffering was gone forever. He was happy in living and he was happy in dying. The fear of old age, sickness, and death was no longer in Gautama. He became the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Ānanda Koomarswāmy describes the comparative meaning of Nirvāṇa in his book "Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism" :

> Nibbāna is one of the many names for the goal and *summum bonum* to which all other purposes of Buddhist thought converge. What are moksha to the Brahman, the Tao to the Chinese mystic, fana to the Sufi, Eternal life to the followers of Jesus, that is Nibbāna to the Buddhist.[5]

The truth of Nirvāṇa has been differently interpreted by the different schools of Buddhism both in Asia and Europe. The early Buddhism identifies Nirvāṇa with the Upaniṣadic

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4. Edwin Arnold, *Light of Asia*, (Chicago : M. A. Donhue & Co , 1879) pp. 165-166.

5. Ananda Koomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New York : University Books, 1964), p. 115.

experience of absolute peace and bliss (Brahmānanda). Whereas the later Buddhism interprets it with the meaning of suchness or tathatā, śūnyatā, or emptiness. The period from the days of the Buddha (500 B.C.) to the days of Aśvaghosh, Nāgārjuna, and Nagasena (150 B.C.—200 A.D.) was more or less original period of Buddhism when the truth was to realize the perfection of existence than to interpret it. Those early Buddhists were much more practical towards their existence. They cared more for the cure (nirōdha) of the worldly disease and suffering (duḥkha) than for the conversation (vādavivāda) on them. As a practical man on this ever killing and ever dying world of time and space, the Buddha cared for the quality of the worldly fruit and not for its quantity. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the meaning of Nirvāṇa as the Buddha meant :

> "Final deliverance is declared by the sage Buddha to be nothing other than a flow of faultless states of consciousness." It is a mental repose free from stress and conflict. The suppression of the evīl tendencies is accompanied by a simultaneous spiritual progrees. Nirvāṇa, which is the consummation of the spiritual struggle, is a positive blessedness. It is goal of perfection and not the abyss of annihilation...... Nāgasena lends colour to the conception of Nirvāṇa as extinction, of cessation of all activities (cittavṛttinirōdha), yet we feel that to some early Buddhists nirvāṇa meant completeness of being, eternal beatitude exalted high above the joys and sorrows of the world.[6]

The meaning of Nirvāṇa, the ultimate Reality of Buddhism, is best described by the Buddha himself in the book the "Dhammapada." There in the chapters of "Buddha-

6. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. I (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 448.

vaggo" and "Sukhavaggo," the Buddha says that the Nirvāṇa is the highest of all achievements, and that highest achievement is nothing else than the highest happiness:

> nibbānam paramaṁ vadanti buddhā (184)
> nibbāṇam paramaṁ sukham (204)
> The awakened declare nirvāṇa to be the
> highest (of things). Nirvāṇa is the
> highest happiness: [7]

As we all know that the Buddha, the exalted One, did not care at all for the metaphysical explanation of this universe. He considered it useless or waste of time and energy to speculate anything before our birth or after our death. He believed that such cosmological and cosmogonical explanations of the universe are not going to solve the present problem of our suffering. He did not need to believe or disbelieve God. Nirvāṇa was the ultimate Reality for him. After the attainment of Nirvāṇa under the Bo-Tree or the Boddhi Tree (batbrikṣa) near the city of Gayā, India, the Enlightened One attained everything. In the Vedāntic term is was the Brahman-Ātman-Unity (Brahmātmaikyam), Absolute Bliss (Brahmānanda), or the Self-realization (Ātmajñāna). This Nirvāṇa has two aspects: One is called upādhiśeṣa-nirvana or jivan-mukti which is attained while physically alive, and the other is called anupādhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa or videha-mukti or parinirvāṇa which is attained after death. The great compassionate Buddha's (mahākaruṇā Buddha) death at Kusinārā (483 B.C.) is called Mahāparinirvāṇā which means departure from this earth with no return because all worldly links were cut-off and the fire of relativity was extinct.

In order to attain that ultimate Truth of Nirvāna, the Buddha introduced a few intermediate truths to be attained, They come in the process of the realization of Buddhahood. They are called the Threefold Refuge or the Three Jewels of Buddhism: I take refuge in Buddha (Buddham saraṇam

7. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 120, 121, 126, and 127.

gacchāmi), I take refuge in Dharma (Dhammam saraṇam gacchāmi), and I take refuge in Saṁgha (Saṁgham saraṇam gacchāmi).

Without the help of these above mentioned refuges or surrender, the ultimate Reality of Nirvāṇa is far beyond to reach, and without the realization of Nirvāṇa or liberation, the philosophy of the Buddha is not truly pursued. Mere idea of Nirvāṇa is not going to lead us to the real experience of Nirvāṇa, says the Buddha. His three refuges are the solid foundation for the realization of the ultimate.

The Buddha was a ptactical man. Modern pragmatists William James, John Dewey, and George Mead will totally agree with the Buddh's principles of practicality. The experience of the Truth and not mere knowledge of it is the foundation of Buddhism. The realization is the reality for the Buddha. Nirvāṇa was the highest realization for him. It was his mystic experience in the words of the Vedānta, the Sūfism, and Christianity.

The first refuge says that I take refuge in Buddha, Buddham saraṇam gacchāmi. The Buddh did not mean by this expression that his followers should worship him as a deity. He never asked his followers to forget themselves and remember Gautama Buddha. He always advised his disciples to build their inside to fight the adversities of the outside. He wanted his followers to be morally strong for the attainment of Buddhahood, the perfection, or the enlightenment. The Buddhahood, said Lord Buddha, is a universal quality attainable by everyone who tries the way he did.

The Buddha did not need anything from anyone. After the attainment of the Enlightenment, he could have passed his life peacefully in some seclusion without returning to the dirty cities of the bewildered masses. The Exalted One did not need to travel far and wide in the scorching sun, muddy rain, and snowy winters of India. He had renounced the world, and his return as a mendicant (paribrājaka) was simply to teach the suffering people to follow his path for the cure of their suffering and the attainment of Nirvāṇa.

Gautama Buddha wanted everybody to be a Buddha, an Enlightened One, and that is the reason why he taught the masses to take refuge in Buddha or attain Buddhahood. The Buddha says in his "Dhammapada":

> dullabho purisājañño na so sabbatha jāyati
> yattha so jāyati dhīro taṁ kulaṁ sukham edhati (Dh. 193)
>
> A well-bred person (a Buddha) is difficult to be found. He is not born anywhere. Wherever such a wise one is born that household prospers.[8]

The Buddha was the firm believer of the law of Karma, which means that action and reaction, cause and effect are interrelated. Every reaction has an action, every effect has a cause, and vice versa. Thus the Buddha believed by his experience that as one sows so one reaps. A man is his own friend and his own enemy. Births and deaths, suffering and happiness are self-caused. Man is the architect of his own future, says the Buddha. He says in his Dhammapada :

> attanā va kataṁ pāpam attanā saṅkilissati
> attanā akataṁ papam attanā va visujjhati
> suddhi asuddhi paccataṁ nāñño aññaṁ visodhaye (Dh. 165)
>
> By oneself, isdeed, is evil done ; by oneself is one injured. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself. No one purifies another.[9]

The above mentioned teaching of the Buddha clearly explains that Gautama Buddha was not a Redeemer or a Savior of any person or nation, He was simply an example of perfection, a symbol of Enlightenment. Unless and until

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8. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 123.

9. Ibid p. 114.

one does the way the Buddha taught to do, one is not going to reach that Buddhistic perfection or Buddhahood (Enlightenment), no matter what else he does. The refuge or the surrender to Gautama Buddha will help the refugee, indeed, to wake up and seek the light, not outside but inside, the way the Lord did. The Enlightened One will make the visibility clear to see both the good and the evil of the world, but to choose the good and avoid the evil is entirely up to the seeker, the refugee. The Buddha did not want his followers to be blindfolded or dogmatic in accepting him and his teachings. He wanted them to experience his presence and his teachings before believing. Saddhatissa calls it "sayam abhinn sacchikatvā, having thoroughly understood and experienced for oneself."[10] Uuderstanding through experience before having faith is the fundamental of the Buddha's teaching.

The second refuse in the philosophy of the Buddha is to take refuge in the Dharma. Dhammam saraṇam gacchāmi, I take refuge in the Dharma. This Dharma or the Law of Nature is the basic theory in the teachings of the Buddha. This is the reality of the gospel of the Buddha who himself practised and asked his followers to practise. There is nothing more to know other than this Dharma.

The Dharma of the Buddha is neither a metaphysical speculation nor an epistemological theory. It is purely an ethical idealism, which deals with self and society, personality and morality, I and thou. The idea behind the ethical idealism of the Buddha is the pragmatism or practicality of ourselves and the society we live in. The teaching of the Buddha's Dharma and saṁgha reflects that the Buddha was not merely an abstract ascetic for himself, but he was a social reformer and spiritual leader too. His pragmatism or practicality was not the copy of modern materialism. His was much higher and refined form of ethics that can be parallel to Vedāntic spiritualism. The teaching of the Buddha was not metaphysical or theocratic. God or the

10. H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, (New York: George Braziller, 1970, p, 56.

soul was not the aim of the Buddha to discover. His experience during his search for the reality of life brought him to this conviction that God or the soul is not the reality of life. God may exist and the soul may be an entity, but that is not what a suffering man needs. A suffering man is he who has not attained Buddhahood or Nirvāṇa. The Buddha neither denies God or the soul nor confirms it. He is never dogmatic either in negating or affirming anything. The infinite is too vast to pin-point, and it is unnecessary to do so. He gives an example of a wounded man who has been fatally shot by an archer. The first duty of that critically wounded man is to take out the arrow from his body and relieve his pain and not to waste time in speculating the direction of the shooting, cause of the shooting, time of the shooting, so on and so forth. By the time he will come to any conclusion of all these speculations, he will be dead. That is the reason that the Buddha kept silent on metaphysical questions.

When the Buddha returned to the cities after his Enlightenment, he met Potthapada, a wandering mendicant, at Queen Mallika's Park where some mendicants (paribbrājakas) were having some philosophical debates. Potthapada asked ten metaphysical questions to the Buddha, and the Buddha's reply was non-metaphysical. Saddhatissa writes in his book about those metaphysical questions and non-metaphysical answers :

> After exchange of opinions the Buddha remarked: 'It is difficult for you, Potthpada, through your other views, other beliefs, inclinations, connections, procedures, to understand either "Consciousness is a man's self" or "Consciousness is one thing and the self another." Potthapada then put the question: (I) Is the world eternal or (II) is it not eternal, (III) is the universe finite or (IV) is it infinite, (V) is the soul same as body or (VI) is the soul one thing and body another thing, (VII) does the

> Tathagata exist after death or (VIII) does he not exist after death or (IX) does he both (at the same time) exist and not exist? The Buddha replied: 'I have made no declaration with regard to these ten questions.' 'Why has the Exalted One made no declaration concerning these matters?' 'I have made no declaration concerning these matters because they do not lead to that which is connected with welfare, truth, or the leading of the Higher Life to discontentment (with the world), to the absence of desire, to calm, to thorough understanding, to the Highest Wisdom, or the Final Bliss (Nibbāna).' 'What, then, does the Exalted One teach?' "Suffering" is my teaching, "the Origin of Suffering" is my teaching. "The Cessation of Suffering" is my teaching. "The way to the Cessation of Suffering" is my teaching.[11]

Thus, as mentioned in the above quotation of questions and answers, the reality of the teaching of Gautama Buddha is Four Noble Truths. His entire philosophy is based on these Four Noble Truths: (1) There is suffering (duḥkha), (2) There is the cause of suffering (samudaya), (3) There is the need of the removal of suffering (nirōdha) and (4) There is the way for the removal of suffering (Mārga).

In order to reach the highest, the Ultimate Reality, or Nirvāṇa, the Buddha has nothing more to say than to utter over and over again his fundamental Four Noble Truths. These Four Noble Truths include his Noble Eightfold Path. He endeavors to hammer these principles of ways and means in his disciples' (bhikkhus) mind with a view to make them realize the highest, Nirvāṇa, against the bondage of the world (saṁsāra). The Buddha's Dhammapada, which

11, H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, (New York: George Braziller, 1970) pp. 62-63.

is the collection of his teachings, gives an elaborate explanation of these Noble Truths and Path:

> dukkhaṁ, dukkhasamuppādaṁ, dukkhassa ca atikkamam
> ariyaṁ c'aṭṭhaṅgikaṁ maggam, dukkhūpasamagāminam. (Dh. 191)
> etaṁ kho saraṇam khemam, etaṁ saraṇam uttamam
> etaṁ saraṇam āgamma sabbadukkhā pamuccati. (Dh. 192)
>
> Suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the noble eightfold path which leads to cessation of suffering (Dh. 191)
>
> That, verily, is a safe refuge, that is the best refuge; after having got to that refuge a man is delivered from all pains. (Dh. 192)[12]

The first noble truth says that our life is full of suffering (duḥkha), the suffering of birth and death, excitment and frustration, excess and want. All the material aspects of life begin with misery and end with misery. Maraṇantaṁ hi jīvatam, life indeed ends in death (Dh, 148). The spatio-temporal world has nothing permanent, and it moves in cycle which has no beginning and no end. The great compassionate Buddha (mahākaruṇā Buddha) could not stand this helplessness of the mankind. He, therefore, in his first noble truth teaches the ignorant people to wake up and realize the temporality of the world we are attached to. He teaches us to see ahead and give up the inertia, forgetfulness, and drunkenness about the entire way of our life.

The second noble truth of the Buddha's teaching is that there is the cause of suffering (samudaya). Here the Dharma or the Law of Nature explains the scientific

12. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) pp. 122-123.

formula of cause and effect, action and reaction. If one sows wheat, one will harvest nothing else than wheat. As one does so one receives. Cause and effect are interrelated. Every effect has a cause and every cause has effect. This is the Law of Nature or the Dharma. Sickness is an abnormal or unnatural state of being. One falls sick because one goes aganist the Law of Nature. His sickness as an effect has the violation of natural laws as the cause. Medical science says that "physiology reverse is pathology."

Lust (Sanskrit trișṇa or Pāli tanhā) is the root of all physical pain and mental agony. Instead of saying in the Vedāntic term that the infinite soul or ātmā can not have satisfaction in the finite things, the Buddha says that the finite things give us suffering (duḥkha). We must give up the lust of finite things in order to avoid suffering. Craving for the material things results in temporary pleasure and permanent dissatisfaction leading towards the cycle of craving, pleasure, and dissatisfaction. No craving means no pleasure and eventually no suffering.

Here the Buddha applies theory of Karma which scientifically says that the birth and death are mutually related to the formula of cause and effect. Our mental and physical goodness or badness is based on our mental and physical action. Good thoughts and good deeds will bring forth mental bliss and physical fitness. The psycho-physical composition of the human body is both friendly and inimical to the master. If the master misuses his five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching by either indulging in or restraining them, he will face the bad consequences of suffering. If he properly uses them, he will reap the reward of bliss. Thus the cause of our suffering is self-made and that is our craving, lust, and attachment.

The third noble truth of the Buddha's teaching says that there is the need of the cessation of suffering (nirōdha). The Buddha, the Enlightened One. could not stand the suffering (duḥkha) of life. He stood against the helplessness of the miserable people, and on the sight of decay and death

of the human body, he renounced the unrealīty of life and set out in search of reality. Siddhārtha knew before leaving his palace that no body likes the decay and death of his most adored body yet everybody lives with it day and night. No body dares to fight it out for the better. The Buddha calls such a state mere helplessness (akarmaṇyatā), weakness (nirvalyatā). The Budda did not want to suffer helplessly and be a part of this human mockery. He prefererd to face the hardship of forest-life where he searched in seclusion the cure of suffering. The spiritual light which he failed to find in the crowd, he found in the peaceful atmosphere of the forest. After the attainment of the Enlightenment, the Buddha saw everything clearly and found these Four Noble Truths. The experience of his own permanent bliss (ānanda) made him realize the truth that everybody needs to be free from suffering. Only a strong desire for the freedom from suffering or duḥkha will lead everybody to the attainment of Nirvāṇa, Liberation or Mokṣa.

The fourth noble truth is the Noble Eightfold Path or the Middle Way to cure the suffering. Here the Buddha lays down eight rules to be followed in order to remove suffering and attain Nirvāṇa. Without the ways and means, no goal of human adventure is successful. Whether it is philosophical perfection, economic enterprise, or political maneuver, one must go through some process for the completion. No attainment of any kind is possible without some sound method.

The eightfold path of the Buddha is the best psycho-physical method for the human perfection. As the Buddha never practiced or preached any kind of extreme, his eightfold path is called the middle path (majjhimapatipāda). This Noble Eightfold Path consists of "right views (sammaditthi), right aspirations (sammasamkappo), right speech (sammavaca), right actions (sammakammanto), right living (sammajīvo), right exertion (sammavayamo), right recollection (sammasati), and right meditation (sammasamādhi)".[13]

13. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London : Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 123.

This Eightfold path is the golden rule of the Buddha for the attainment of the highest, Liberation, or Nirvāṇa. These fundamental rules were taught by the Buddha on his first sermon given to his disciples at Īsipatanā, near Benāras. It is called "Discourse of Setting in Motion the Wheel of Law" (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). It is against both the extremes of self-indulgence (kāmasukhallikanuyoga) and self-mortification (attakilamathanuyoga).

This Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha teaches fundamentally three things : Śila or outword conduct, prajña or intuitive insight, and samādhi or final detachment. These can be interpreted as physical, mental, and spiritual check and balance for the highest attainment.

The right view asks the seeker of truth to understand the Four Noble Truths which say that the world (Saṁsāra) is full of impermanence (anicca), suffering (duḥkha), and no-soul (anatta). It is an awakening from the darkness of the world for the Enlightenment where the seeker will see the reality of his life. Right aspiration asks to have pure thoughts free from lust (kāma), violence (hiṁsā), anger (krōdha), pride (ahaṁkāra), passion (wāsanā), etc. Right speech wants the seeker not to offend any one by any abuse (pisunavāca), harsh words (pharusavāca), lies (musavāca), or any kind of idle talk (samphappalapa). Right action refrains the truth-seeker from killing, stealing, indulging in sexual activities, and so on. Right livelihood forbids one to live on the trade of slaves, meats, poison, etc. Right effort is meant for the self-purification, and it has four parts : (1) The effort should be to prevent the rise of any evil in his being ; (2) the effort should also simultaneously be directed to unroot the evil, if any, already existing in the being ; (3) the effort should introduce good ; and (4) the effort should cultivate that introduced good. The perfected being is attributed by ten qualities and is called the person of "Ten Perfections : or Dasaparamitās : (I) generosity (dāna), (II) morality (sīla), (III) renunciation (nekkhamma), (IV) wisdom (panna), (V) energy (vīrya), (VI) patience (khānti) (VII) honesty and truthfulness (sacca),

(VIII) determinatation (adhitthana), (IX) loving kindness (matta), and (X) equanimity (upekkā).[14] Right mindedness wants one to be vigilant about his mind, body, feeling, and ideas. They should be always in control for the sake of perfection. They must not be hindrances to the truth-seekers on the path of Enlightenment. Right contemplation or concentration is the final stage. Here after crossing the border of sīla and prajña, the seeker reaches the summit of worldly affairs and merges himself in samādhi or total detachment. This state of his being is the highest he can go. In this state he experiences what is ultimate Truth, the Reality of Life, Nirvāṇa. In Upaniṣadic term, this final stage can be called the stage of Brahman-Ātman-Unity (Brahmātmaikyam). The man of this final stage of the Eightfold Path is called Arhat or the saint. An Arhat is on the last path of the eightfold path and the last order of the four Āryan orders : srotapanna, who is in the stream of births and deaths ; sakridgāmin, who has come back once ; Anagāmin, who does not come back ; and Arhat, the perfect one who experiences Nirvāṇa. The Buddha talks about the state of the saint or Arhat who has attained the highest :

> gataddhino visokassa vippamuttassa
> sabdādhi
> sabbaganthappahīnassa parilaho na
> vijjati (Dh. 90)
>
> There is no suffering for him who has completed his journey, who is freed from sorrow, who has freed himself on all sides, who has shaken off all fetters.[15]

Thus the Buddha's Dharma contains the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. These canons are preserved in three Buddhist scriptures which are called three "piṭakas" or three baskets : Vinaya, the discipline ; Sutta, the tales ; and Abhidhamma, the doctrine. These

14. H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, (New York : George Braziller, 1970) p. 72.

15. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London : Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 89

Buddhist truths (satya) and paths (mārga) of conduct (sīla), insight (prajña), and detachment (samādhi) are the central points of the Buddha's teaching, They are the best of all the teachings of the world. The Dhammapada of the Buddha says about the greatness of these enlightening paths in one of its chapters Maggavaggo (the Path):

> maggān aṭṭangiko seṭṭho, saccānaṁ
> caturo padā
> virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṁ dipadānaṁ
> ca cakkhumā (Dh. 273)
>
> Of paths the eightfold is the best; of truths the (best are) four sayings (truths); of virtues freedom from attachment is the best; of men (literally two-footed beings) he who is possessed of sight.[16]

The reality of the third refuge in Buddhism is to take refuge in the Saṁgha—saṁgham saraṇam gacchāmi, I take refuge in the Saṁgha. Here the Buddha wanted a community of the bhikkhus or truth seekers. The Exalted One takes a significant step forward for the purification of the entire environment. The first two refuges are aimed at the psycho-physical purification (śuddhi) of the individuals. Whereas the third refuge is for the environmental purification for the society as a whole.

From both ethical and metaphysical point of view, the development of the self and the society is very much dependent on the environment they live in. The inside and outside of nature is so much interrelated that one can hardly remain un-affected by the other. The outside climate of cold and heat affects the inside of a being in his psycho-physical build-up. The environmental goodness of peace, justice, love, and equality enhances the incentive of the seekers of goodness. The son of a butcher who lives days and nights in the environment of bloody killing will have very hard time to understand and practice the meaning of compassion. Whereas the child who has been

16. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 145.

brought up in the environment of love and compassion will not have to exert much to go on the path of compassion and co-existence. If the Buddha himlself would have met a Saṁgha or the company of enlightened bhikkhus, he did not have to go through such an ordeal of forest life. In the forest the Buddha found the peaceful atmosphere that he needed for his perfection.

Everybody is not interested to seek Enlightenment with the kind of hardship the Buddha undertook, and, therefore, the Buddha wanted a community of pure environment where all types of bhikkhus or truth-seekers can have opportunity to attain Enlightenment and experience Nirvāṇa. The one who cares for only two refuges (dvesarṇa) is called "dvevācika upāsaka," and the one who cares for three refuges (tisaraṇa) is called "tevācika upāsaka." It was this idea of environmental purity that led to form the Buddhist community in the world, and in the golden age of Emperor Ashoka, the gospel of Buddhist Brotherhood of Man spread far and wide inside and outside India.

Thus the ethical philosophy of the Buddha was spiritually and morally enlightening all grades of people all over the world. It was a universal truth because it had universal appeal—Brotherhood of Man. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the Buddha's influence on the world scene :

> The humanists honour him as one of the earliest protagonists of their cause—the happiness, the dignity, and the mental integrity of mankind. Those who declare that men can not know reality, and others who affirm that there is no reality to know, use this name. Intellectual agnostics who flirt with a vague transcendentalism quote his example. Social idealist, ethical mystics, rationalist prophets are all attracted by his teaching and utilize it in their defense. [17]

17. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, (London : Oxford University Press, 1958). p. 27.

Finally, the reality in Buddhism according to the Buddha can be summarized in the Three Jewels—the Buddha or the Wisdom, the Dharma or the law, and the Saṁgha or the pure community. These Three Jewels are preserved in his Trī Piṭakas or the Three Baskets—Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidharma (Pāli Abhidhamma). They are based on the triadic code of śīla or conduct, prajña or insight, and samādhi or total detachment. The ultimate reality is Nirvāṇa, free from suffering, permanent bliss. It is the same as the Bhagavadgītā's "brahmanirvāṇam rccati" which says that one can have the bliss of Brahman (B. G. II-72). This Nirvāṇa is similar to the Vedāntic "parmānandam" as described in the Upaniṣads: bhūmaive sukham, only the infinite is happiness (C. U, VII-23-1). This Nirvāṇa is negatively described by the Buddha as the cessation of pain or duḥkha, and it is positively described by the Vedānta as the happiness eternal or Brahmānanda. The reason the Buddha touches this ultimate reality negatively is to prevent the common people from falling into any kind of attachment with the final goal. Nirvāṇa is that purified state of mind which can be established only by the total detachment from all kinds of mental and physical actions and their results. This perfect state of mind is free from superstitions and speculations. This is the nature of a karma yogin who attains Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātmaikyam according to the Upaniṣads and brahmisṭhiti or life eternal according to the niṣkāma karma yoga of the Bhagavadgītā.

The Buddha wanted to lift up the people above the misery and agony of the so-called religion and nationalism. Narrow nationalism or shallow faith of any kind was unacceptable to the Buddha. He was born in Hindu religion as an Āryan national of Āryāvarta or Bhārat or India, but he never limited himself either by religion or nationality and spread his gospel beyond the boundaries of Hinduism inside and outside India. The philosophy of the Enlightened One was of supercosmic range, beyond the fences of nationalism and internationalism. The exalted

experience of Nirvāṇa made him realize the eternity here on the earth, and thereafter his teaching of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Saṁgha) endeavored to pave the way for everyone to become Boddhisatvas. The Buddha believed by his experience that every individual has the potentialities to become a Buddha, an Enlightened One. All he has to do is to understand the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha and to proceed on his Noble Eightfold Path. This gospel of "Dharmacakrapravartana" or "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Law" was Gautama Buddha's first teaching to the first disciples among whom were renowned Sāriputta and Mōgallāna about whom the Buddha used to say that they were as good as he himself. Their perfection was similar to that of the Buddha.

The theistic speculation about God or soul was a waste of time and energy for a happy living on this earth according to the Buddha. God may exist and the soul may come to exist, but they do not concern a suffering man who may die any time. The futility of the termporal world made him think something positive. Life seemed to him the most risky thing to gamble with, because it can cease to exist mercilessly any moment. Any priestly religion or dogmatic faith existing at his time had no solution for this problematic life of suffering, decay, and sudden death. The Buddha, a positive thinker, must find a cure of the helplessness of the human race. He discovered the ethics of life to live and let live in perfection. It was the humanity and not the divinity that seemed to him closer to reach and easier to deal with. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the ethical importance of the Buddha's teaching :

> Ancient Buddhism resembles positivism in its attempt to shift the centre from the worship of God to the service of man. Buddha was not so keen about founding a new scheme of the universe as about teaching a new duty. It was his privilege to start a religion independent of dogma and priesthood, sacrifice and sacrament,

> which would insist on an inward change of heart and a system of self-culture. He made it clear that salvation does not depend on the acceptance of doubtful dogmas or doing deeds of darkness to appease an angry God. It depends on the perfetion of character and devotion to the good. [18]

Goodness is the name of godliness in Buddhism. Liberation from the world of suffering and not the paradise or heaven here-after was the goal of the Buddha. The Buddha hammers on the scientific truth of the Law of Karma, cause and effect. The good will breed good and the evil will breed evil. This is the law of Nature which everyone must obey for his own best, and the best of all natural beings is the purpose behind this law of Nature. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the Buddha's scientific view of karma :

> The uncertain nature of philosophical speculation which indulged in all sorts of fancies, and the practical conviction which made men throw the burden on gods rather than rely on their own efforts, led Buddha to confine his teaching to this world. A strictly scientific attitude sees no god in the thunderbolt or angels in heaven. Religious illusion was dissolved by the natural interpretation of things. The hypothesis of a personal God seemed inconsistent with it. The law of karma requires us to reject all notions of favouritism, caprice and arbitrariness...There is nothing superior to Karma. [19]

The entire philosophy of the Buddha is purely based on reason. He denies to believe anything that does not pass

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18. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London ; George Allen & Unwin, 1966) p. 357.

19. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* Vol. I (London :George Allen & Unwin, 1966) p. 454.

through the process of logical discussion and personal experience. The experience of Nirvāṇa may make him as divine as any religious god, but the great believer of perfection here and now has no attraction to worship or to be worshipped. He does not desire to be a divine or supernatural symbol, but by the attainment of Nirvāṇa he succeeds to go beyond the limits of mankind and teaches his followers to do the same. He believes the ethical value of natural rights and duties. According to the Buddha, one has no obligation to believe without understanding, and once understood, it is one's duty to believe. This philosophy of sradhā or faith, darśan or sight, and bhāvanā or cultivation is the experience of the Buddha who teaches it to his disciples or bhikkhus to realize. His noble truths and path are logically based on the middle path or the Mādhyam Mārga, free from the extreme. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains this middle path of the Buddha:

> He wanted to establish a "religion within the bonds of pure reason," and thus put an end to both superstition and scepticism. He rarely assumes a prophetic role. He is a dialectician, arguing with his opponents to lead them to liberation. He presents to his followers the experience through which he himself has passed, and exorts them to verify for themselves his views and conclusions.[20]

Thus it is quite proper to conclude that the reality of Buddhism says that the followers of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths proceeding on his Noble Eightfold Path have money-back guarantee to experience the ultimate Reality of Nirvāṇa or Liberation. It is the spiritual summit of the world wherefrom they will have the universal view of oneness all over they glance.

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20. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. I (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1956) p. 359.

Chapter V

THE DOCTRINE OF BRAHMAN AND MĀYĀ ON THE BASIS OF THE BRAHMA SŪTRA

The doctrine of Brahman and Māyā plays the central role in the orthodox religions of India, and it is the life line of the Vedāntic thought. From the early days of the Vedic karma-kāṇḍa or the ceremonialism to the modern age of the Vedāntic jñāna-kāṇḍa or the Knowledge, philosophy (darśan) behind all religious and rational activities is the realization of Brahman the Supreme above the phenomenal reality of His Māyā. The knowledge of the unknown eternal behind the known temporal is the main goal of the triadic canon or the *Prāsthantraya* of the Vedānta—the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā, and the Brahma Sūtra. This goal of eternity is most emphasized in the Brahma Sūtra.

The Brahma Sūtra, which is said to be the summary of the Upaniṣads, endeavors to define and describe the meaning of eternal Brahman and His temporal Māyā. This book begins with the sūtra or verse of Brahman-knowledge: "athato brahma-jijñāsā, now therefore the desire to know Brahman" (B. S. I-1-1).

Thus the opening sūtra of the Brahma Sūtra undoubtedly explains that the text is aiming at the knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Reality. Everything else is either already known or not worth knowing. The karma-kāṇḍa philosophy of the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā is not acceptable to the jñāna-kāṇḍa thought of the Uttara Mīmāṁsā or the Brahma Sūtra. This Brahma Sūtra or the Uttara Mīmāṁsā believes in pure knowledge of eternity and not the earthly knowledge of the temporal prosperity. The compromise between the phenomenal and transcendental knowledge, Jñāna-karma samuccaya-vāday, is not acceptable to the Brahma Sūtra commentator Śaṁkara. This text aims at the ultimate knowledge, pāramārthic jñāna, and not at the empirical knowledge, vyāvahāric jñāna.

The Brahma Sūtra is one of the threefold canons, prasthāntraya, of the Indian thought. It endeavors to interpret the ritualistic Vedas scientifically for the modern world. In the present dynamic world of ours, the ancient dogmatic faith must be rationally presented for a better understanding. Knowledge on the basis of reason and not on the basis of religion is the goal of the Brahma Sūtra. The traditional Vedic religion is re-interpreted and systematized by the author and the commentators of the Brahma Sūtra.

Bādarāyaṇa is the author of the Brahma Sūtra. It is said to be composed in the second century B. C., a little later than the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā of Jaimini. There had been great attempts in the past before Bādarāyana to comment on the Upaniṣads, but none was complete to be an authentic one. Hence Bādarāyana intended to systematize those disorganized commentaries with his own thoughtful interpretation. His masterpiece contribution is the source of entire Vedāntic commentaries, non-dualistic and dualistic (advaita and dvaita).

This Brahma Sūtra is also called the Vedānta Sūtra or the Śāririka Sūtra as it deals with the Vedic thought and the knowledge of the Self. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the origin and purpose of the Brahma Sūtra in his book 'The Brahma Sūtra':

> The Brahma Sūtra is the exposition of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads. It is an attempt to systematize the various strands of the Upaniṣads which form the background of the orthodox systems of thought. It is also called Uttara-Mīmāṁsā or the investigation of the later part of the Vedas, as distinguished from the Mīmāṁsā of the earlier part of the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇās which deal with ritual or karmakāṇḍa.[1]

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma sutra* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 21.

The Brahma Sūtra has four chapters or adhyāyas, and each chapter is divided into four padas or parts. Each of these padas or parts is subdivided into adhikaraṇas or sections which are composed of sūtras or concise statements. The number of sūtras in each section depends on the size of the topic dealt therein. Some topics take lengthy explanation whereas some take brief. The commentary in the text is based on two main points: question and answer, reasoned statement of the objection and the clarification of the objection, pūrva-pakṣa and uttar-pakṣa. Every section or adhikaraṇa of the text has five factors : (1) viśaya, subject matter, (2) viṣaya, doubt, (3) pūrva-pakṣa, objection, (4) Sidhānta, final truth, and (5) saṁgati, connection between defferent sections. The first chapter of the book deals with samanvaya or the coherent interpretation of the different texts of the Upaniṣads. It tries to show the interrelationship of the basic thoughts of the texts. The second chapter deals with avirōdha which shows that the Upaniṣadic principles are not inconsistent with the writings and expressions of other sages and philosophers, The third chapter deals with sādhanā or the method of Brahman-Ātman-Unity, Brahmātmaikyam. The fourth chapter deals with phala or the fruit of spiritual knowledge.

The Brahma Sūtra of Bādarāyana has been interpreted by various sages, scholars, and philosophers in various ways. Some Vedāntins like Śaṁkara have explained it in absolutely non-dualistic way (advaita-vāda). Rāmānuja and his followers are the believers of qualified-non-dualism (viśistādvaita-vāda). Madhava believes in dualism (dvaita-vāda). Nimbārka interprets it in existent-nonexistent way (bhedābheda-vāda). Vallabha and his followers are the supporters of pure non-dualism (suddhādvaita-vāda). These are the five main Vedāntic systems of thought through which the Supreme Reality, the Brahma Vidyā, or the Brahman-knowledge has been explained by the great commentators of the Brahma Sūtra. These are the five pillars of the Vedāntic philosophy which endeavor to unveil

the mystery of the universe and reach the ultimate Reality that lies beyond the visible changeability. These great seers (draṣṭā) devoted their entire life in search of the universal truth. They lived and died for their spiritual discoveries, not just for themselves but for their fellow beings. Whether this phenomenal world is one or many or both, existent or non-existent or both, cause or effect or both, parts or whole or both, etc., are their questions and answers.

Brahman has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'brh' which means 'to grow' or 'to evolve.' Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the meaning of Brahman in his Brahma Sūtra :

> Brahman, according to Ś., is the cause of the origination, subsistence, and dissolution of the world which is extended in names and forms, which consists of many agents and enjoyers. (1) This world must have been produced as the modification of something which is itself unproduced. Brahman is the source and if it is produced from something else, we will have anāvastha or regressus ad infinitum. (2) The world is so orderly that it could not have come forth from a non-intelligent source. Brahman is the intelligent source. (3) The Brahman is the immediate consciousness (sakśin) which shines as the self and also through the objects of cognition which the self knows. Even when we deny it, we affirm it. [2]

Thus Brahman is the cause, the sustainer, and the end of the world. He is the unmoved mover in the words of Aristotle. There is nothing logically before Him and beyond Him. According to the Vedāntic non-dualists and dualists, Brahman is within and without everything we

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960) p. 30.

preceive and we do not perceive. Chāndogya Upaniṣad says: "sarvam khaly idaṁ brahma, tajjalan iti". This whole world is Brahman, from which He comes forth, without which He will be dissolved, and in which He breathes" (C. U. III-14-1). All this is Brahman means the Supreme Reality is both material cause (upādāna-kāraṇa) and efficient cause (nimitta-kāraṇa). He is both fine and gross, spiritual and physical, noumenal and phenomenal, transcendent and immanent. Our limited senses are incapable to grasp the unlimited power of the Supreme. "satyam jñānam anantam brahma, Brahman the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinite" (T. U. II-1-1) is beyond our comprehension. We can have a glimpse of Him through intuition and not through the senses. Srī Aurobindo describes Brahman, the Supreme Reality, in his book 'The Life Divine':

> There is then a supreme Reality eternal, absolute and infinite, it is in its essence indeterminable. It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining Mind; it is ineffable by a mind-created speech; it is describable neither by our negations *neti neti*,—for we can not limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that—nor by our affirmations, for we can not fix it by saying it is this, it is that, *iti iti*. [3]

According to the human concept, i. e. from the finite point of view, sat-cit-ananda or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss has been considered the nature of Brahman. This sort of concept is a kind of compromise between the positivists' iti iti, this and that, and negativists' neti, neti, not this and not that. This is the latter Upaniṣadic thought supported by all great Vedāntins from Śaṁkara to Aurobindo. They say: Brahman does not exist; He is the Existence. He is not conscious; He is the Consciousness.

3. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, (3rd edition; New York: India Librery Society, 1965). pp. 382-383.

He is not blissful He is the Bliss. Christopher Iserwood writes in his book 'Vedanta for Modern Man':

> Vedanta (so called because it was first expounded in the Vedas, the earliest Indian scriptures) is a nondualistic philosophy. It teaches that Brahman (the ultimate Reality behind the phenomenal universe), is 'one without a second'—Brahman is beyond all attributes. Brahman is not conscious; Brahman is consciousness. Brahman does not exist. Brahman is existence. Brahman is the Atman (Eternal Nature) of every human being, creature, and object.[4]

According to Śaṁkara and Śaṁkara's school of thought, Brahman is absolutely non-dualistic, "one, without a second, ekam evādvitīyam" (C.U. VI-2-1). This Absolute Brahman is our ultimate Reality. He is beyond cause and effect. The spatiotemporal phenomena are contained in him. This world of cause and effect is empirical reality (vyāvahāric satya) of the Supreme. It is not the ultimate Reality (pāramārthic satya). These empirical and transcendental experiences do not signify the theory of dualism, says Śaṁkara. They are one and the same because uitimately they reach the same goal of eternity. They are like the two sides of a silver coin, Śaṁkara says that they look different or a world of many due to our ignorance (ajñāna) or nescience (avidyā). Once the ignorance is removed with the help of right knowledge (jñāna), the duality is gone and the oneness of the Supreme Reality is visible. As we see our physical face in the mirror after taking off our colourd spectacles and cleaning the mirror, so we will see the universal Self within our self after purifying our heart and uplifting our mind. This supersensible experience of the Supreme is called intuition or spiritual insight.

4. Christopher Iserwood, *Vedanta for Modern Man*, (ed.) (2nd. ed.; Los Angeles: Vedanta Press, 1964) p. IX.

In this intuitive experience, the subject-object duality is gone, The knower is one with the known. The individual self experiences oneness with the universal Self. The particular self is identified with the universal Self like the spark and the fire, the jar of water and the ocean of water. Once they are united, they become one. This is called Brahman-Ātman-Unity, Brahmātmaikyam. This is the end of entire human effort. This spiritual realization is the goal of our knowledge. This is the ultimate Truth of Śaṁkara's advaita Vedānta. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains in his book 'The Brahma Sūtra' :

> A mere intellectual understanding of reality is not enough. The end of all knowledge is spiritual realization, *anubhavāvasanam eva vidyā-phalam.* Knowledge and renunciation lead to the experience of self, *svānubhava* or *ātmānubhava.* This is the aim of religion. These experiences are recorded in the Upanisads. [5]

Non-dualist Śaṁkara as well as dualist others advocate that the phenomenal world of time and space is not an illusion like the lotus of the sky or the barren woman's son. The lotus of the sky or the barren woman's son is absolutely non-existent. The world of senses is real, but it is real temporally. This temporal reality is dependent, relative. These temporality and eternity are the two aspects of the Supreme Reality, Brahman. Our goal should be the attainment of eternity and the renunciation of the temporality.

The temporal world is Brahman's Māyā or śakti or power, and it is so, i. e. appearing and disappearing, because Brahman wants it that way. He does as He pleases. It is not possible for the finites to know the mystery of the Infinite. Māyā's abysmal depth must be taken into consideration. The experience of pain and pleasure in this world of appearances and disappearances is caused by our avidya

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 30.

or ignorance. Once the right knowledge or jñāna is acquired, the mystery of Brahman is unveiled, Māyā is exposed. As the right knowledge of the real rope corrects the mistake of snake in the rope, so the Brahma-jñāna or Brahman-knowledge will clear up the mistaken knowledge of Brahman in His Māyā.

The word Māyā is derived from the root 'mā' which means 'to form' or 'to build'. It is the power or śakti because only power or śakti can build, form, or deform. All these movements of making and unmaking, forming and deforming, are done through some power. Independent Brahman's dependent Māyā acts in this subjective and objective show of the temporal world. Dr. Radhakrishnan describes the relation of Brahman and Māyā in his book 'The Bhagavadgītā':

> While the world is dependent on Brahman, the latter is not dependent on the world. This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivability of the relation between the Ultiamate Reality and the world are brought out by the word, "Mayā." The world is not essential being like Brahman; nor is it mere non-being. It can not be defined as either being or non-being. [6]

Eternity is the ultimate Reality, and that should be our goal, says Śaṁkara. He does not believe to have both the enjoyment of the temporal world and then at last the effort for the attainment of the eternal world, jñān-karma sammuccaya-vāda. He believes in the total renunciation of the empirical reality (vyāvahāric-satya) for the attainment of the transcendental Reality (pāramārthic-satya). He is not against the idea of having a gradual progress towards the ultimate, but he does not support it for the reason that such compromising process is a slow proces. He, like the

6. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (5th impression : London : George Allen & Unwin 1958), p. 38.

Buddha, believes in total renunciation of the temporal world and the attainment of mokṣa, nirvāṇa, or Liberation here and now. Śaṁkara says that this phenomenal world is Brahman's Māyā or recreation and we should not waste our short time in getting involved in it. This Māyā or the līlā of the Supreme is so vast that it is impossible for us to get anything out of it in such a short span of our life. The best thing for us is to give it up altogether and search for the Māyin (the Māyā Maker) or Brahman who is no where else than within us. Thou art That, tat tvam asi. The realization of this immanent Brahman, Ātman, is the attainment of the Ultimate. Dr. Dasgupta explains Saṁkara's Vedāntic idea of the Self in his book 'A History of Indian Philosophy':

> The main idea of the advaita (non-dualistic) Vedānta philosophy as taught by Śaṁkara school is this, that the ultimate and absolute truth is the self, which is one though appearing as many in different individuals. The world also as apart from us the individuals has no reality and has no other truth to show than this self. All other events, mental or physical, are but passing appearances, while the only absolute and unchangeable truth underlying them all is the self. [7]

According to the non-dualistic interpretation of the Brahma Sūtra, the individual self and the world of Māyā exist together in the Absolute. This co-existence of the subjective self and the objective world is the līlā or the play or the Māyā of Brahman the Supreme. This subjective self exists for himself (svārtha) while the objective world exists for others (parārtha). The former is the enjoyer, whereas the latter is enjoyed. The subject is active, and the object is passive. This phenomenal world of subject

7. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (Reprint; Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 439.

object is indescribable or anirvacanīya. All we can say that it is sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa, uniquely existent and non-existent. It is 'sat', because it is temporally existent, and it is 'asat', because it is eternally non-existent.

Thus according to Śaṁkara, our self is the only entity which we can rely on, because it is eternally existent. In the words of Descartes, we can deny everything, but we can not deny our self, because by denying it, we simply confirm it. This individual self is no other than the immanent Brahman, Ātman. The Upaniṣads say, aham brahmāsmīti, I am Brahman (B.U. I-4-10). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains Śaṁkara's view on Brahman the Self:

> Ś. says that Brahman is known for Brahman is one's own self, ayam ātmā brahma. No one thinks that he does not exist. Each one cognizes the existence of himself sarvo hy ātmāstitvam pratyeti na na aham asmi iti.[8]

It is accepted that the entire Brahma Sūtra has its essence expressed in the first four sūtras. Thus in order to know the details of the book, one should try to understand the depth of these introductory sūtras or verses.

The sūtras of the Brahma Sūtra are written precisely in the shortest possible words with great simplicity. Clarity with brevity is traditionally fundamental in the Vedāntic literature. Maximum ideas are intended to be contained in the minimum words. Such condensed form of expressions has instant impact in philosophizing, and some of the aphoristic sūtras are religious symbols for contemplation.

These sūtras (links) need thoughtful interpretation, and their interpretation varies from interpretor to interpretor as they convey multi-sided ideas. The central theme of all the interpretations remains the same.

Brahman is the primary thought of the Brahma Sūtra, and Māyā or the phenomenal world is the secondary

8. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960): 231.

thought of it. The entire book deals with these two subject matters. The realization of Brahman the Supreme and the renunciation of His phenomenal Māyā is the goal of this text. According to Śaṁkara, one needs to know Brahman and not His Māyā. It is easier to know a man outwardly than to know him by reading his mind. The same is with Brahman and His mental outlet Māyā. Brahman's purpose behind His Māyā is unfathomable. Māyā is Brahman's nature or prakṛiti. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says: "māyām tu prakṛitiṁ viddhi, māyinaṁ tu maheśvaram. Know then that prakṛti is Māyā and the wielder of Māyā is the Great Lord."[9] The idea behind the action of an actor is harder to know than to understand the actor simply by looking at him on the stage. The personality of a human actor in general—his race, color, sex, physique, etc.—is easily understood the moment he appears on the stage. The same way according to the Vedāntins, Brahman the Absolute should be understood in general by His supreme power which is reflected in the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of such a vast universe of innumerable galaxies. This Māyā which is the world of cause and effect, action and reaction, looks different or frustrating because of our avidyā or ignorance. Śaṁkara says not to waste time in regarding or disregarding Māyā or the temporal world but to devote in regarding one's own self or Ātman who is no other than immanent Brahman, the eternal Reality. Direct knowledge of one's self is more reliable than the indirect knowledge of the outside world. Mentalist Berkeley's theory of immaterialsm says that it is only the self-consciousness that can be directly known. Other than self-knowledge is mere perception, i. e. what mind reflects. According to Berkeley, esse ist percipi, essence is perception. Man is the measure of everything, says Platonic Protagoras in one of Plato's Dialogues. The materialism of Marx, the mentalism of Nietzsche, and the mind-matter theory of Descartes even

9. S. Radhakrisdnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (2nd. impressions, London George Allen & Unwin, 1968) p. 734.

deny God without man. The Mahābhārata tells the same thing about the immanent Brahman in man. Sri Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine' maintains the same principle about Brahman the Supreme, the highest human conception :

> The Brahman, the Absolute is the Spirit, the timeless Self, the Self possessing Time, Lord of Nature, creator and continent of the cosmos and immanent in all existences, the Soul from whom all souls derive and to whom they are drawn,—that is the truth of Being as man's highest God-conception sees it.[10]

For the attainment of Brahmajñāna, Brahman-knowledge, the divine knowledge, Śaṁkara prepares the seekers with certain physical and mental disciplines. These rules are the prerequisites for that highest goal and not the Vedic Karama-kāṇḍa or ritualism. Those fundamental rules are the following : (1) nityānityā-vastu-viveka, discrimination of the eternal and the non-eternal, (2) ihamūtra-phala-bhoga-virāga, detachment from this worldly and other worldly enjoyment, (3) sama-damādi-sādhanā-sampat, attainmen of tranquility, self-control, renunciation, patience, concentration, and faith, and (4) mumuksutva, desire for total liberation.

Rāmanuja's interpretation of this introductory "athato brahma-jijñāsā" is little different from Śaṁkara's. He says that the Brahmavidyā succeeds the karma-kāṇḍa or the ritualism of the Vedas, and, therfore, "atha" means after the performance of the Vedic dharma. For him, Brahman is Nārāyaṇa, all pervading, all powerful. Mādhava says that "atha" does not mean any Vedic or non-Vedic requirement. It simply means that we begin now the enquiry of Brahman. He says that "nityānitya-vastu-viveka, the discrimination of the eternal and the non-eternal is not the means but the

10. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine* (3rd edition ; New York : India Library Society, 1965), pp. 624-625.

ultimnte goal. For him, Brahman is Viṣṇu, God. Śrīkāntha interprets this first sūtra as the beginning of the Brahman-knowledge after (atha) the fulfillment of certain Vedic dharma or rites. Nimbārka and Vallabha believe that the Brahmajñāna is a unified whole whose parts are karma-kāṇḍa and jñāna-kāṇḍa, ritualism and renunciation, Pūrva Mīmāṁsā and Uttar Mīmāṁsā, the former phase and the latter phase. The latter phase of perfection is dependent on the former phase of preparation. No one can attain anything without karmas or actions.

Non-dualist Śaṁkara says that one does not need any paraphernalia or procession for the search of Brahman, the ultimate Reality. He is already within us, "mano hy ātma, mano hy lokaḥ, mano hy brahma. Mind is, indeed, the self, mind is, indeed, the world, mind is indeed Brahman" (C. U. VII-3-1). These Upaniṣadic thoughts present the idea of inward search, self-realization. One simply has to give up his ajñān or ignorance by rooting out the conception of duality between him and Brahman, Creator and the creature. His body is the dwelling of his self or Ātman who is the same universal Self or Brahman who pervades all over. He must realize through the disciplined processs, as Śaṁkara has prescribed, that his Ātman is that advaita or non-dual Brahman. The gospel of tat tvam asi or Thou art That has to be the philosophy of his life for the attainment of his highest goal, Brahman-realization. Śaṁkara is not against the theistic worship of Viṣṇu or Siva. He wants to make his own body the temple of omnipresent Siva or Viṣṇu who resides there as his self or Ātman.

The second sūtra of the text says : "janmādi asya yataḥ" which means that the ultimate Reality is that from which origin, sustenance, and destruction of this world proceed. In other words, the ultimate Reality or Brahman is the cause and effect of the world we see and we do not see. This spatio-temporal world of causality is dependent on Brahman from the beginning to the end.

According to this sūtra, the Brahma Sūtra does not believe or advocate that the knowledge of Brahman or the

ultimate Reality can be attained by neglecting the world of Brahman. It does not say that the world we live in has no concern with our ultimate goal. It does not plead for spiritualism against materialism. Neither does it say that there is nothing beyond phenomena. On the contrary this sūtra endeavors to explain the transcendental truth on the background of empirical existence. It intends to explain the harmony between the two. The idea is to revive the meaningfulness in and the purpose of the Creation. It heralds that the "janmādi", the origin, sustenance, etc., have not come from nothing. Neither have they come automatically. This Creation has a Creator who has some purpose behind His creating. Our purpose is not to know this abysmal purpose of the Almighty but to live with it for our best.

According to the Brahma Sūtra, Brahman the Absolute creates Iśvara or God out of his Māyā, prakṛti or nature, and that Īśvara is the cause of the spatio-temporal world. This is Brahman's recreation or līlā, say the seers of the Brahma Sūtra. This relative world does exist, and it has its nature which governs it by its laws. These natural laws must be obeyed in order to co-exist as the natural beings. As we are the parts of it, we can not live without going along with it. A fish can not survive if it is inimical to the water. We fall sick whenever we violate the natural laws. We are aware of the saying that physiology reverse is pathology. Kind nature is always at our disposal. It heals our wounds with the assistance of the medical science. If nature is against any patient, his medical aid fails to cure even a minor cut. Thus the entire process of a life is controlled by nature. This growing, sustaining, and dissolving power of God's or Īśvara's nature represents the magnificent organization and craftsmanship of Brahman the Supreme. This worldly display of cause and effect, action and reaction, gross and subtle, complexity and simplicity, unity and diversity, etc., explains the meaningfulness behind the artistic and scientific recreation or līlā of the Supreme. From the days of the Homeric Greece and the

Vedic India to the modern era of science and technology, the affectionate nature of the world has been regarded as our source and sustainer. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on the nature-loving tendency of the ancient Greek religion :

> The significant quality of early Greek religion, as we find in the Homeric view of life, is its acceptance of nature. The miraculous, in the sense of transcending the natural order, does not play an important role. Even if Homeric gods interfere in mortal affairs, they do so, not by changing the natural course of events, but by participating in it. [11]

Both these natural and supernatural, cosmic and supracosmic, powers and laws of the Supreme Reality are our source, sustainer and transformer. This world of relativity is bound in the Absolute Brahman, but the Absolute Brahman, is not bound to anything.

The third sūtra of the text says : "śāstra-yōnitvat", which means that Brahman is the source of all the scriptures. Śaṁkara provides two interpretations of this sūtra : (1) śāstra or scripture is the source of Brahman-knowledge. (2) Brahman is the source of sāstra or scripture that reveals Truth of the universe.

Śāstra or the literature that reveals the Supreme Reality has been considered sacred in India from the days unknown. It is traditional to the Indian culture to pay respect to the ancestors and regard their philosophical and religious writings. Those ancient seers and their literature were the product of their time. Their ideas and emotions in the search of the ultimate Reality may have a little different language and tempo. That does not mean that their desire for knowing and the truth of their knowledge were different from those of ours. Truth is a universal thing, and it is

11. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London ; George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 238.

not bound by spatio-temporal causality. The past, present and future are successively inter-related. To neglect the past means to make the present baseless. One learns from the past for the present to build his future. This reverence to the ancient seers and their thoughtful deeds is the reason why after years of foreign invasion and internal turmoil, the Hindu culture is still standing vigorously in comparison to other contemporary cultures of the world. Reformation is always welcome in India, when it is considered reaction elsewhere.

The Vedas have been considered the life-line of the Indian culture. They are called "apauruṣeya" or independent of human origin. The Vedas, the source book of Indian thought, is called "śruti" which means the revealed truth, the truth that was heard by the seers (draṣṭā) in silence. Īśvara, God, made Himself herd by the seers who meditated days and nights to have the glimps of Him. God finally came to them in the form of Veda (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva). God is thc servant of His devotees. He appears the way His worshippers want Him. The Bhagavad gītā says: "ye yathā māṁ prapadyante taṁs tathai va bhajāmy aham. As men approach me so do I accept them" (B. G. IV-11).

These Vedas, epics, purāṇas, and other scriptures, which have been inspiring the Indians from the days of their origin, can not be the work of mad men. The historic seers like Yājñavalkya, Bharadvāja, Vyās, Maitrī, and others did not contribute these philosophical assets out of bewilderment. They have conveyed through the Vedas the universal message of the Supreme Reality. These śāstras or scriptures are the Brahmavidyā, knowledge of the Supreme. The Vedānta (vedasya antaḥ) is the end or the conclusion of the Vedas.

The fourth sūtra endeavors to bring harmony in the various texts. It says: "tat tu samanvayat. That is the result of the harmony (of the different scriptural statements)". According to this sūtra, Brahman is the theme of all the Vedic scriptures. Harmonizing factors in the

various texts is Brahman. Though some interpret Him non-dualistically, some dualistically ; some call him Viṣṇu, some call him Śiva ; yet they all reach the same Supreme Brahman monotheistically, polytheistically, or pantheistically.

Śaṁkara interprets this sūtra with a view to show the authority of Brahman over all religious scriptures. Whether one is Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu, one is a man first, and as a man he has certain potentialities and ambitions which are common to all. Logically, it can be said that almost all sensibly, rational, or religious men desire for eternal happiness, and that desire is fulfilled no where else than in the realization of their own selves. That inner self of a man whether realized directly or through some symbol indirectly tells him that he is no other than the part of the Supreme. The mental power of the man tells him that he is the supermost creature on the earth. According to the human reasoning, the human mind, other than the divine mind, is the best judge of the things on the earth. Reasonably, he resembles to none than the Supreme. A self-realized man identifies himself to Brahman or God.

Dr. Radhakrishnan expresses his view on the unity of the diversified religions :

> Unfortunately rivalries among religions are retarding the growth of an international community, the fellowship of man. If we accept the view that the scriptures of the world are the records of the experiences of the great seers who have expressed their sense of the inner meaning of the world through their intense insight and deep imagination, we will not adopt an attitude of dogmatic exclusiveness. [12]

According to the Brahma Sūtra, Brahman is the essence of all manifested and unmanifested things. The manifested

12. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (George Allen & Unwin. 1970), p. 250.

phenomena are relatively real. Whereas, the unmanifested is absolutely Real. Brahman is both the matetial (upādāna-kāraṇa) and the effiicient cause (nimitta-kāraṇa) of the phenomenal and the transcendental worlds.

As regards the motive behind the Creation of God, there are various speculations. Except the Creator, no one knows how far these speculations are correct. The Brahma Sūtra says : "lokavat tu līlā kaivalyam, As in ordinary life, creation is Brahman's sport" (B.S. 11-1-33). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the purpose of this Creation :

> Men in high position, who have no unfulfilled desires, indulge in sport. Ś. uses the example of breathing which goes on without reference to any extraneous purpose, merely following the law of its own nature. So also creation proceeds from the nature of the Supreme without reference to any purpose. We can not question why God's nature is what it is. We have to accept it. [13]

Finally, it can be said that Brahman the Supreme is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He is self-luminous (svayṁ prakāś), unborn (ajāta), eternal (śāsvata), infinite (ananta), and blissful (ānanda). According to the Brahma Sūtra, the sun, the moon, the stars and all the planets shine there where shines Brahman. Brahman residing within us as Ātman or Self is easier to be experienced if we realize our selves. One is desperate in this temporal world due to his ignorance or ajñāna. Once one realizes the philosophy of tat tvam asi, Thou art That, one is free from suffering, and he reaches the ultimate goal of mokṣa, nirvāṇa, or liberation.

13. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960). p. 362.

Chapter VI

THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA, JÑĀNA, AND BHAKTI ON THE BASIS OF THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

The Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā are the triple canon (prasthān-traya) of the Hindu thought and the subject matter of the Vedānta. Among these great philosophical and religious texts, the Bhagavadgītā is the most revered and widely accepted book in India and abroad. The fundamental reason of its massive appeal and reverence is its excellent unity of the diverse philosophical thoughts. This unified force of the integrated ideologies of the various sects of India is the prime factor in the universality of the Bhagavadgīta. Karma or action, jñāna or knowledge, and bhakti or devotion are the basic principles of all the religious philosophies, Eastern and Western. Lord Kṛṣṇa, the perfect Mind, taught these fundamentals to His devotee Arjuna.

These karma, jñāna, and bhakti are three fundamental means to the end of mokṣa, nirvāṇa, or Liberation. Any of these three great paths (mārga) is adequate for a true seeker to attain the ultimate Reālity. The combination of these three will be a masterpiece. Lord kṛṣṇa, the teacher of the Gīta, was the master of these three, and, therefore, He is called an Avatār or a Divine Incarnation. He was a brave saintly teacher. He had the cool mind of a saint, the passionate fire of a hero, and the compassion of a teacher, This great combination of the three main ways to perfection is the eternal contribution of the Bhagavadgīta to the mankind.

If we will search the truth in all the living religions of the world, we are sure to find the trace of either all or any of these paths (mārga) of the Gītā. Whether one is an abstract metaphysician (pārmārthic) like Plato, Śaṁkara, and Kant, or a strong activist (karmaṭha) like Marx,

Lincoln, and Gandhi, or a gentle devotee (bhakta) like Augustine, Rāmānuja, and Ramakrishna, one has to follow any of these well-founded paths of the Bhagavagītā.

There are many opinions regarding the date and the authorship of the Bhagavadgītā. In general, it has been accepted that it is pre-Christian and post-Upaniṣadic in origin at around 4th century B. C. Like many anonymous books of ancient India, the Bhagavadgītā does not have any confirmed author. Vyās, the legendary compiler of the Mahābhārata and the Vedas, has been attributed with the authorship of this sacred book of the Hindus. The eighteen chapters of the Bhagavadgītā comprise the chapters XXIII to XL of the Bhiṣmaparvan of the Mahābhārata, the great epic of India.

There are innumberable translations and interpretations of the Gītā in India and abroad. The interpretations vary from individual to individual. These interpretations are rather complementary than contradictory. Orientalist Garbe called it Saṁkhya-yoga. Hopkins considered it kṛṣṇite version of Vaiṣnavism. Keith named it an Upaniṣad of Śvetāśvatara type. Barnett found it a diffusion of various traditions.

Among the authentic commentators of the Gītā are Śaṁkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhava, Nimbārka, Vallabha, Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Radhakrishnan, and Mahesh. As regards the variety of opinion on the theme of the Bhagavadgītā, Dr. Radhakrishnan expresses his view in his book 'The Bhagavadgītā' ;

> These different opinions seem to arise from the fact that, in the Gītā, are united currents of philosophical and religious thought diffused along many and devious courses. Many apparently conflicting beliefs are worked into a simple unity to meet the needs of the time, in the true Hindu spirit, that over all of them broods the grace of God. [1]

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1. S. Radhakrshnan, *The Bhagavadgita,* (5th imp. ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1958) p. 15.

All the above mentioned great commentators of the Gītā uphold one common reality that God the Supreme is one only without a second, ekam evādvitīym (C. U. VI-2-1). They all agree that both the transcendent and immanent, invisible and visible, are the parts of one Brahman the Supreme. They also very much agree that the means to that goal of Reality are many. Some ways are short, when some are long ; some are difficult to go through, whereas some are easy to cross. In this journey to the Reality, some have steep mountains to climb and turbulent rivers to cross, when some have simply plain land of thorny forests ahead. It depends on the ability and taste of the truth-seekers to choose the right path. One should not choose the particular path of Reality because it is supposed to be easy. One should follow the path according to one's mental ability and physical capacity, says the Bhagavadgīta. One can go to New York either by bus, by train, by bike, or by plane depending on one's psycho-physical stamina and financial stability.

According to the Bhagavadgītā, every individual has a particular need and capacity to do a particular job. One should not do a job because it is more fruitful or because somebody else has done it. One is the best judge of one's self. He should be open-minded in getting good advices and opinions regarding the process he is going to apply and the policy he is going to pursue, but he must weigh his own needs, inclination, and ability in connection to those undertakings. For the best accomplishments, one should never be irrational or emotional at the time of final decisions on main matters of life. By following the natural course of his inclinations, aptitude, and necessity, he will attain his cherished goal fast any easy. The four main groups of mankind—Brāhmins, or teachers, Kṣatrīyas or warriors, Vaiśyas or traders, and Sūdras or unskilled workers—were created by God with their respective nature and aptitude. The Gītā says :

Cāturvarṇyaṁ mayā sṛstaṁ
guṇakarmavibhāgasḥ (B. G. IV-13)

The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of quality and work. (S. R.)

The above mentioned four main groups of people have inclinations and potentialities which they have inherited, acquired, and developed in course of time. These four divisions of people have nothing to do with the hereditary caste system of India or elsewhere. As a matter of fact, Idia's present rigid caste system which has degenerated to a loathsome discriminatory level was not so when it was formed. It was founded sociologically on the basis of individuals' psychological and physical standard. The idea was to guide the childern to their future career on the basis of their inherited psycho-physical tendency and capacity for their best achievements. Like present days' aptitude test in the modern educational system, the Platonic division of mankind in the Republic of Greece and the caste system (varṇāśram) in India were initiated. A teacher's son born and brought up in the educational environment will be a better teacher than a carpenter. A farmer's son will naturally be a better farmar than an engineer in general. Therefore, the Gītā says that in order to get the best out of a person in his such a short stay on this earth, it is his dharma or duty to do according to his inclination, need, and ability. Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to obey his kṣatrīya dharma or warrior's duty and fight the battle for the sake of justice. The Gītā proclaims that it is preferable to die in one's dharma, duty, or potential tendency than to seek refuge elsewhere :

Śreyān svadharma vigunah
paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
svadharme nidhanam śreyaḥ
paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ (B. G. III-35)

Better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. Better is death in (the fulfillment of) one's own law for to follow another's law is perilous. (S. R,)

Sri Aurobindo has commented on this svadharma or individual's duty in his book 'The Gita'. There he supports the idea of dispassionate act, reasonable performance free from blind faith and rash emotion. He writes :

> Man has a conscious intelligent will, *a buddhi,* and to that he must refer his actions. If he does not do so, if he acts blindly according to impulses and passions, then the law of his being is not rightly worked out, he acts not as a man. but as an animal. [2]

Arjuna the hero of the Mahābhārata was a Kṣatrīya or warrior by caste. Fighting in the battlefield for the cause of justice was his dharma or duty. It was embedded in his blood and bone. He had fought many battles, won many wars, and vanquished many enemies before. It was not his nature to denounce fighting or run away from the battlefield for any earthly or heavenly cause. This particular so-called compassion or mercy towards his enemy was nothing but timidity, cowardliness, or accidental emotion. It was an excuse, not for a just cause but for selfish attachment. His own kith and kin were involved as his enemies in this great fight of Kurukṣetra. He forgot his Kṣatrīya dharma or duty of upholding justice at all costs. Justice is the Supreme for all Kṣatrīya. It is the only Truth for them. If for the sake of justice a dutiful (dharmābalambi) Kṣatrīya will have to give up his precious kingdom, affectionate son, and beloved wife, he will never hesitate to do so. India's history is full of such great persons like Rāma, Hariścandra, and the Budha,

Arjuna, a Kṣatrīya or warrior, was forgetting his dharma or his natural law of protecting the just and destroying the unjust, and he was getting engulfed by the mōha or passion for his own mean people. Such eruptions of emotion for a wrong cause do not befit a warrior like Arjuna. This is the

9. Anilbaran Roy (ed.) *The Gita*, by Sri Aurobindo Ghose (2nd. ed. : Pondichery : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1954(, pp. 63-64.

moment of downfall of a gallant disciple, and therefore, Kṛṣṇa, the Justice in person, appears on the scene of the Mahābhārata and teaches the gospel of the Bhagavadgītā to his great follower Arjuna. He teaches this universal truth for the benefit of his pupil Arjuna in particular and the mankind in general. Arjuna the hero and the Kurukṣetra the battlefield are symbolic media for the conveyance of the Reality to the world. The battle of Kurukṣetra or the battle between the good and the evil is found in everybody's heart day and night like that of Arjuna, and disturbed by the complexity of this worldly struggle, everybody seeks solution from some philosophical teaching like that of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The truth of the Gītā is fruitful to all who sincerely seek the remedy of their worldly frustration.

The Reality of the Bhagavadgītā says that the Supreme is one. He is called and known by various names. The Upanisads call him Brahman outwardly and Ātman inwardly. That Thou art or taṭ tvam asi is the gist of the Upaniṣads. The Supreme is also known as God, Īśvara by the devotees or bhaktas. The man of wisdom or the jñāni call him Saccidānanda, the justice, the Law, Dharmarāja, and so on. One Supreme pervades in all. The Gītā says:

> He is the Light of lights, said to be
> beyond darkness. Knowledge, the object
> of knowledge and the goal of knowledge—
> He is seated in the hearts of all.
>
> (B.G. XIII-17)
> (S. R.)

Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā that whoever worships Him in whatever way is appealing to Him. He being the one omnipotent (sarvaśaktimān), omnipresent (sarvabbyāpī), and omniscient (sarvajña) Being includes everything. According to the law of cause and effect, action and reaction, all human and non-human activities are respectively reacted. If one sows wheat, one will harvest wheat, not rice. Snow feels cold and fire feels hot. This is the law of

nature. Just like these physical and metaphysical laws, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme, reacts to His followers. Those who like Him, get the best, and those who hate Him, get the worst. It is not the fact that He plays favouritism or partisanship of any kind. He being the source, sustainer, and destroyer of all, does not need to play the game of politics with His dependents. The whole universal system is based on His fair supervision or recreation. As far as we see, we know that our entire phenomenal world is set on the law of karma, i. e. cause and effect, action and reaction. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā :

> ye yathā māṁ prapadyante
> tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham (B. G. IV-II)
> As men approach me so do I
> accept them. (S. R.)

Whoever follows whatever ways in the name of his only refuge, reaches nowhere else than Him. The finite being will know the infinite Being only through his own self or some divine symbol, i. e. self-realization or God-realization based on either karma, jñāna, or bhakti. These are simply the various ways to the divine summit. After reaching that summit, all will have the same view. Dr. Radhakrishnan expresses his view on this unity in diversity :

> The same God is worshipped by all. The differences of conception and approach are determined by local colouring and social adaptations. All manifestations belong to the same Supreme. "Viṣṇu is Śiva and Siva is Viṣṇu and whoever thinks they are different goes to hell."
> "harirūpī mahādevo lingarūpī janārdanaḥ
> iṣad apy antaraṁ nāsti bhedakṛn narkaṁ brajet."
> (Bṛhannaradiya) [3]

3. S. Radhakrishnan, *Tho Bhagavadgita* (5th imp., London : George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 159.

The philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā believes that the Supreme Reality is one without a second, and that one is Brahman who is our ultimate goal. The world of Māyā functions in accordance with the will of that Brahman. Everything that we know and we do not know depends on Him. The world will not come to exist automatically against the will of the Supreme. Lord Kṛṣṇa explains this purposeful divinity behind the universe.

> I am the father of this world, the
> mother, the supporter and the grandsire.
> I am the object of knowledge, the purifier.
> I am the syllable Aum, and I am the rk,
> the sāma and the yajus as well. (S. R.)
>
> (B. G. IX-17)

This passage of the Gītā shows that the Supreme Reality is not merely the mass of concrete matters or the collection of abstract spirits. It possesses great many values of superhuman, human, and subhuman nature. Its function has meaning and purpose. There is harmony, concord, and rhythm in this Supreme's play. The Creation is based on some kind of harmonious and lawful binding and folding. This is what we human beings scientifically experiment, understand and explain.

The above mentioned passage of the Gītā also shows that the Creator of the universe is also the caretaker like father and mother. This paternal and maternal treatment of the universe by the Supreme explains the meaning of avatāra, the divine incarnation, or God in person. God, being a person too, appears on His created earth whenever it is necessary for Him to do so. As the parents help their children to grow to a healthy and prosperous life, so does the affectionate Supreme to His Creation. He helps a little and hits a little. He pushes forward and pulls backward like a gymnast. In all these mental and corporal, physical and metaphysical activities of the Lord, there is the tenderness of heart and firmness of hand. In this ever operating and healing process of the universe, there are some blood, cuts, cries, and pleasure involved which we

must not misunderstand. We curse God in our plight and praise Him in our delight, We run to attain His help when we falter, but we soon forget Him when we are set aright. This is the childish game we play with the Supreme, and the merciful Lord always tackles that fatherly. Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches the theory of avatāra or divine incarnation to Arjuna in the battlefield when Arjuna forgets that his teacher is not an ordinary man but the Supreme in the form of a man. Lord kṛṣṇa says :

yadā-yadā hi dharmasya
glānir bhavati bhārata
abhyutthānam adharmasya
tadā, tmānaṁ sṛjāmy aham. (B. G. IV-7)

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create, incarnate) Myself. (S. R.)

The belief of the divine incarnation, God in man, or avatāra is deeply rooted in the Indian philosophy. From the very beginning of the Hindu community to the present days, the scripture says that there have been already ten divine incarnations in the land of India. God has taken birth on the earth on ten different occasions, in ten different human and sub-human forms, for ten different purposes. These ten divine descents are perceived ones, but only God knows when He comes, why He comes, and where He comes. Being the head of all, He knows where the correction is needed and what method is required. Accordingly, He appears on the earth time after time for the protection of justice and the preservation of peace. We finites know very little about the appearances and disappearances of the personified Infinite. Lord Kṛṣṇa further says :

paritrānāya sādhūnāṁ
vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
dharmasamsthāpanārthāya
sambhavāmi yuge-yuge (B. G. IV-8)

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the

> establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age. (S. R.)

As a Creator of the systematic Creation, the Supreme will have to uphold law and justice, and for that sake, He will have to protect the just and punish the unjust. That is the reason of the Divine Advents on the earth. The question arises that why the Supreme, being the cause of both dharma and adharma, good and evil, let the adharma or evil override the dharma or good in the first place? The Vedāntins answer that it is Brahman's Māyā or līlā or play. We finites can not comprehend this mystery unless and until we remove our avidyā or ignorance and become one with the Supreme Brahman. The mystery of fire or water goes away when one becomes one with it. The divine descent or avatāra is a kind of lead kindly light to guide in the darkness of the world. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the meaning of avatāra or the divine incarnation:

> An avatāra is a descent of God into man and not an ascent of man into God, which is the case with the liberated soul. Though every conscious being is such a descent, it is only a veiled manifestation. There is distinction between the self-conscious being of the Divine and the same shrouded in ignorance. [4]

God being omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, knows when to do what and how. Being Parmātman or the Soul of the souls, Parmeśvara or the Power of the powers, and Puruṣottama or the Person of the persons, the Supreme appears in any soul at any time in any capacity for the uplift of His created beings. This all-pervading God appears on the earth for some divine purpose. Whenever the lower level of the Supreme tries to overrule the upper level of His Creation, He takes a drastic action as much as necessary in whatever form at whatever place. He can

4. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (5th imp.; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1958) p. 34.

appear as Rāma in the Tretā (the second human era according to the Hindu literature), as Kṛṣṇa in the Dvāpara (the third human period), as the Buddha in 563 B. C., as Jesus in the first century, as Mohammed in the 7th century A. D., and so on.

The divine incarnations have some celestial purpose. Rāma's advent was for the protection of the mahātmās or saints against the brutality of Rāvaṇa. Kṛṣṇa had been to protect the just Pandavas against the unjust Kouravas. The Buddha came to spread enlightenment at the time of darkness. Jesus arrived with the mission of love. Mohammed came with the slogan of brotherhood. According to the Hindu literature, He can also appear in the subhuman creatures like fish (matsya), boar (barāha), tortoise (kachapa), dwarf (bamana), etc. for a particular purpose at a particular time. He does as He pleases. According to our understanding, whenever there is dispute between good and evil, the Supreme judge intervenes to settle it by siding the good against the evil. Sri Aurobindo explains the meaning of avatāra, the descent of the Infinte into the finite :

> How can God who is infinite be born as a finite human being ? Far from this being impossible, the whole universe is nothing but an appearance of the infinite One in finite forms. Every conscious being is in part or in some way a descent of the Infinite into the apparent finiteness of name and form. But it is veiled manifestation and there is a gradation between the supreme being of the Divine and the consciousness shrouded partly or wholely by ignorance of self in the finite. When the unborn knows itself and acts in the frame of the mental being and the appearance of birth, that is the height of the conditioned manifestation ; it is the full

> and conscious descent of the Godhead, it is the Avatāra. [5]

Thus these divine incarnations are the embodiments of the Supreme as their advent is superhuman and their extraordinary purpose is to save the world form setting on the horizon. For that sake they protect the justice, root out the injustice, and maintain peace. The Bhagavadgītā is the teaching of Kṛṣṇa, one of the divine incarnations, to His disciple Arjuna.

The philosophy of Kṛṣṇa's teaching is not merely spiritual or material. It is a synthesis of both. It is a trinity of Vedāntic monism, Sāṁkhya dualism, and Yoga activism. It combines the metaphysical idealism of the Upaniṣads, the theism of the Bhāgavata, and the ethics as demonstrated by the Buddha. It tries to attain the knowledge (jñāna) of the Supreme through devotion (bhakti) on the solid foundation of action (karma). It does not teach merely the dry absolutism of the impersonal Brahman. It also teaches the sweet devotion of the personal God, Puruṣottama, the Person of the persons. Dr. Eliot Deutsch writes on the synthetic philsophy of the Gītā :

> The Gītā is synthetic, if not elective in its philosophical dimensions. It seeks to harmonize many of the trends and ideas in the thought of its time and consequently introduces few new or original technical ideas of its own. It it apparently more concerned to weave what is takes to be meaningful in each divergent philosophical trend into a single whole from its own standpoint of spiritual experience than it is to put forth new philosophical ideas of its own. [6]

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5. Anilbaran Roy (ed.), *The Gita*, by Sri Aurobindo Ghose (2nd ed ; Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1954), p. 69,

6. Eliot Deutsch, *The Bhagavadgita* (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 5.

Gradual march on the physical reality towards the transcendental Reality is the goal of the Gītā. Concrete gradual progress towards the ultimate goal of eternity is more realistic than just the approach of an abstract speculation. Practicality or yogaśāstra is the teaching of Yogeśvara Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of yogas. Sri Aurobindo explains the divine utterance of the Gītā : yogah karmasu kauśalam, yoga is skill in work :

> Action done in Yoga is not only the highest but the wisest, the most potent and efficient even for the affairs of the world ; for it is informed by the knowledge and will of the Master of works : "Yoga is the true skill in works." [7]

The word "yoga" is derived from the root "yuj" which means to yoke or join. The practice of yoga is the unique way of reaching the goal. Psycho-physical control is essential for any physical or metaphysical attainment. According to yogacārya Patañjali, there is eightfold method for the psycho-physical control : yama (abstention), niyama (observance), āsana (posture), prāṇāyāma (regulation of breath), pratyahāra (withdrawal of the senses). dhyāna (fixed attention), dhāraṇa (contemplation), and samādhi (concentration). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the meaning of yoga :

> Whatever peculiar adaptations the term yoga may have in the Gītā, it throughout keeps up its practical reference. Yoga is getting to God, relating oneself to the power that rules the universe, touching the absolute. It is yoking not merely this or that power of the soul, but all the forces of heart, mind and will to God. It is the effort of man to unite himself to the deeper principle......Yoga thus comes to mean the

7. Anilbaran Roy (ed.), *The Gita*, by Sri Aurobindo Ghose (2nd ed., Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, (1954), p. 38.

> discipline by which we can train ourselves to bear the shocks of the world with the central being of our soul untouched. It is the method or the instrument, upāya, by which end can be gained. [8]

Thus the part of yoga is tremendous in the Indian Vedic and non-Vedic literature. The Gītā without yoga is merely Upaniṣadic idealism or Sāṁkhya dualism and not the yogasāstra (the science of knowledg, devotion, and action) as taught by Yogeśvara Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of yogas. Finally, explaining the nature and character of a yogin, (the one who practises yoga) Lord Kṛṣṇa says that a perfect yogin, who has subdued his all desires and has centralized his all thoughts on his inner self through strict physical and mental discipline sees the universal Self in all beings and all beings in the universal Self:

> He whose self is harmonized by yoga seeth the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; everywhere he sees the same.
>
> (B. G. VI-29) (S. R.)

The Sāṁkhya philosophy of dualism—puruṣa and prakṛiti, God and nature, substance and attributes—is one of the three main philosophies of the Gītā. The master-mind of Guṇātīta (beyond qualities) Kṛṣṇa has excellently united Sāṁkhya's plurality of souls with the Vedāntic Absolute Brahman who is one without a second. The Supreme Spirit and the individual spirits have been existing together from the time immemorial, the latter being dependent on the former. The liberated individual souls are as free as the Supreme, says Śaṁkara in his interpretation of the Sāṁkhya dualism in the Gītā. The saints and sages are the liberated souls (muktātmā). They simply come and go either for their ordeal (parikṣā) or atonement (prāyaścitta). They are close to avatāra or the divine incarnation.

8. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. I (8th imp ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966). p. 532.

Though Kṛṣṇa accepts the plurality of Sāṁkhya, He denies the renunciation part of Sāṁkhya which says that ascetism or saṁnyās is the only way to Liberation. He does not believe in the idea that prakṛiti or nature is an obstacle for a person or puruṣa, and the person or puruṣa should seek mokṣa or Liberation outside nature or prakṛiti. Here the Gītā strengthens the subject-object relationship and declares that renunciation or saṁnyās is one of the ways and not the only way to the Supreme. Here the Gītā advocates the Vedāntic oneness which comprises both puruṣa and prakṛiti, God and His nature.

According to the Gītā, nature or prakṛiti is not a mirage or the lotus of the sky. This phenomenal world of our existence is a reality. Whatever exists has some reality in it. Some exist permanently and some exist temporally. In order to attain the permanent Reality, we do not have to deny the changeable one but to detach from it. The theory of detached action or niṣkāma karma-yoga is the fundamental philosophy through which the Gītā endeavors to synthesize the trinity of Yoga, Sāṁkhya, and Vedānta. Sri Aurobindo says in his book, 'The Gītā':

> Such, subtly unifying Sāṁkhya, Yoga and Vedānta, is the first foundation of the teaching of the Gītā. It is far from being all, but it is the first indispensable practical unity of knowledge and works with a hint already of the third crowning intensest element in the soul's completeness, divine love and devotion. [9]

Niśkāma karma-yoga is the foundation of the universality of the philosophy or darśana of the Bhagavadgītā. This principle brings together the attainment of the best here and hereafter, empirical goodness and transcendental godliness. Here lies the coexistence of materialism and spiritualism which together form the Supreme. By accepting

9. Anilbaran Roy, (ed.) *The Gita*, by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, (2nd ed ; Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1954), p. 38.

both the parts of the Whole, God is not biased to any. The Gītā neither indulges in materialism (bhautik-vāda), nor does it take refuge in abstract spiritualism (ādhyātma-vāda). Describing the temporality of the material reality, the Gītā advises to depend gradually more and more on the eternity of the spiritual Reality. Thus the teachings of the Gītā are based on the ethical and metaphysical values.

In order to combine both ethical and metaphysical realities, the Gītā has introduced three fundamental ways: the way of action or the karma-yoga, the way of knowledge or the jñāna-yoga, and the way of devotion or the bhakti-yoga. These are three well-founded means to the ultimate goal ol Brahmātmaikyam or Brahman-Ātman-Unity. The followers of all these paths or any of these paths have sure success. A sincere seeker of Truth on any of these paths will undoubtedly reach his ultimate goal like Janaka, Yājñavalkya, the Buddha, Śaṁkara, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Gandhi.

The path of karma-yoga or the way of action is described in the beginning of the Gītā. The very teaching of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna starts with the philosophy of action and inaction. When the great warrior Arjuna tries to be inactive in the midst of warfare on the pretence of non-violence or saintliness, then Lord Kṛṣṇa appears on the scene to put Arjuna on the right path. Here he starts teaching the philosophy of niṣkāma karma-yoga or the detached action. Action is better than inaction, but the detached action, action without the desire of experiencing its fruits, is of superior quality.

As regards the action, Lord Kṛṣṇa, karma-yogin the great, says to Arjuna that no one can live for a moment without doing some kind of work. The very existence of any kind is based on action. Nature or prakṛiti of the Supreme is ever acting and so do the natures of dependent beings. Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

> For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; every one is

made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature.

(B. G. III-5) (S. R.)

The path of action of karma-yoga is useful and accessible to the people of all categories, intelligent or dull, theist or atheist, believer or non-believer. Here there are stages to go through in order to reach the highest. It is considered to be the smooth process. One has to be dutiful here according to one's nature (svabhāva) and religion (svadharma). Thus the work done according to one's nature and religion (svabhāva and svadharma) honestly has sure success because such work has strong backing of one's natural energy based on one's solid religious foundation. The idea behind this niṣkāma karma-yoga or detached action is to work with full energy without any digression while in process, and after attaining the result, one should not get intoxicated with the indulgence or inertia. Attachment with the future result of his work will distract his attention while working and will slow down his working force. This philosophy does not reject the fruit of work but detaches one from the fruit. The attachment with the fruit of work is hindrance in progress. The pleasant fruit may lead to indulgence or overconfidence resulting in intellectual blindness, and the bitter fruit may lead to frustration or mental bankruptcy resulting in inertia or moral death. That is the reason why the Gītā alarms against the aftermath of the gain of an attached action and professes the great philosophy of niṣkāma karma-yoga or detached action, It says:

karmany evā, dhikāras te
mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karmaphaḷahetur bhūr
mā te saṇgo 'stv akarmani

(B. G. II-47)

To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive, neither let there

be in thee any attachment to inaction.

(S. R.)

The value of karma-yoga is well described by Tilak, the great karma-yogin of modern India, in his book 'Gita Rahasya' (Karma-Yoga-Śāstra). The very translation of the Bhagavadgītā is Karma-Yogo-Sāstra or the Literature of Karma-Yoga according to Tilak. His thoughtful interpretation of the Gītā describes the pivotal significance of the karma-yoga in the teaching and learning of the Gītā. The teacher Kṛṣṇa does not start teaching spiritual knowledge or the path of devotion to a saint or sage. He starts with inactive Arjuna and teaches him to stand on his own firm feet to face the world and fight the adversity of life. He teaches Arjuna the meaning and purpose of karma-yoga, the path of action. In order to strengthen that path He further adds the path of knowledge (jñāna-yoga) and the path of devotion (bhakti-yoga). Tilak says that all these three paths are interrelated for the support of karma-yoga :

> I do not say that the Gītā does not contain any exposition of Devotion and of Spiritual Knowledge. All that I say is that (I) the practice of looking upon Energism, Devotion, and Spiritual Knowledge as three independent and equivalent Nisthas, and making an equal division of eighteen chapters of the Gītā amongst these three, as on a partition between the members of the joint family, is not proper ; that (II) the Gita supports only one path, namely the path of karma-yoga based on Knowledge, in which Devotion is the most important factor ; and that (III) the exposition in the Bhagavadgītā of Sāṁkhya philosoppy, of Spiritual and wordly Knowledge, and Devotion has been made only incidentally, for supplementing and supporting the exposition of the path of karma-

> yoga, and not for dealing with those subjects as independent subjects. [10]

All the eighteen chapters of the Gītā, describing action, knowledge, devotion, Brahman, Ātman, and so on, finally end in karma-yoga. The philosophy of karma-yoga or the path of action is the only synthesizing factor in the various schools of thought in the Gītā which itself is the intersection or the combination of all the philosophies of India. All diverse ideas, ways, and goals conclusively merge in this main river of karma-yoga. Tilak further says in his Gita Rahasya :

> Just as the form of the Ganges does not change whatever the number of rivers which come and join it, so also is the case with the Gita. Whatever it may contain, the Karma-yoga ultimately remains principal subject matter of the Gita. [11]

Mahatma Gandhi was another example of a great karmayogin. Work was his life. After realizing the temporality of the worldly reality, he set aside all wordly glamour and glory and marched on the path of detached action or niṣkāma karma-yoga. Like Janaka, Gandhi believed in the co-existence of self and society, personality and morality. He believed in the realization of self not outside the society but inside the society. He developed his personality not at the cost of morality and vice versa. Mead's philosophy of "Social Self" and Martin Buber's philosophy of "I and Thou" are quite applicable to Gandhi's social personality. Mead says :

> The unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole. [12]

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10. B. S. Sukthanker, (trans.), *Bhagavadgita* Rahasya, Vol. 2, by B. G, Tilak, Gita Rahasya (Poona : Tilak Bros., 1936), pp. 645.

11. Ibid., pp. 662-663.

12. Anselm Strauss (ed.), *On Social Psychology*, by George Herbert Mead (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969) p. 208.

Mahatma Gandhi lived and died as a karma-yogin, a man of action. His all personal, social, political, and religious policies and decisions were guided by the Gītā's philosophy of niṣkāma karma-yoga. For his personal satisfaction, social justice, religious equality, and political freedom, Gandhi always took refuge in the solacing power of the Gītā. He has expressed his appreciation of the Gītā in "Young India", one of the magazines of India :

> "I find solace in the Bhagavadgītā that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavadgītā. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā. (M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 1925, pp. 1078-1079.) [13]

The philosophy of niṣkāma karma-yoga or detached action is not so easy to perform as it sounds. There are various mental and physical restraints to be practised before one will be called a perfect yogin or sthitaprajña. Lord Kṛṣṇa describes to Arjuna the characteristics of a perfect sage in the last part of the second chapter, and it was Mahatma Gandhi's daily prayer and practice.

A niṣkāma karma-yogin enjoys the calmness of the ocean and firmness of the mountain. His all senses are in his control. He has purified his heart and concentrated his mind. He is more inside and less outside. His body is the field or kṣetra, and he is the fieldowner or kṣetrajña. He cultivates spiritual crops in his physical ground. His world of thinking and doing is different from that of the common people. His day is others' night and others' day

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13. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, (5th imp. ; London : George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 10.

is his night. In other words, a mahātmā or a great soul is above the average and beyond the normal people, and he is one in million. A perfect yogin's state of mind is permanent happiness or parmānanda. The Gītā says :

> eṣā brāhmī sthitih pārtha
> nai 'nām prāpya vimuhyati
> sthitvā 'syām antakāle 'pi
> brahmanirvāṇam ṛcchati (B. G. II-72)
>
> This is the divine state (brāhmīsthiti) O Partha (Arjuna), having attained thereto, one is (not again) bewildered ; fixed in that state even at the end (at the hour of death) one can attain to the bliss of God (Brahmanirvāṇa).
>
> (S, R.)

The jñāna-yoga or the path of wisdom is the second great path of reaching the ultimate Reality of Brahmānanda or the bliss of Brahman-Ātman-Unity. As the Gītā's first six chapters emphasize the karma-yoga, so do its second six chapters stress on the jñāna-yoga. In this jñāna-yoga, which deals with the philosophy of Sāṁkhya, Lord Kṛṣṇa explains the reality of puruṣa and prakṛiti, God and the world, subject and object. Here jñāneśvara, the Lord of Wisdom, Kṛṣṇa teaches spiritual wisdom and worldly knowledge, jñāna and vijñāna.

In this jñāna-yoga, the Gītā says that there are four types of virtuous people on this earth, who somehow or other are after the temporal or eternal reality. They are called : arto or the man in distress, jijñāsu or the seeker of knowledge, arthārthy or the seeker of wealth, and jñāni or the man of wisdom. Out of these four types of people, the jñāni or the wise is the best. Lord Kṛṣṇa says :

> Of these the wise one, who is ever in constant union with the Divine, whose devotion is singleminded, is the best. For I am supremely dear to him and he is dear to Me.
>
> (B. G. VII-17) (S.R.)

The jñāna yoga teaches not merely the spiritualism or materialism but the synthesis of both the realities. It is a rational approach to the world of our existence. Here though the central philosophy deals with puruṣa and prakṛti or subjective God and objective nature of Sāṁkhya, yet the speciality of the Gītā lies here in connecting both as the two parts of one Brahman the Absolute. Instead of reaching the abstract Brahman directly through the difficult way of renunciation, ascetism, or saṁnyās as the Śāṁkhya says, Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches the easy and smooth path of knowing the Absolute indirectly through the realization of one's inner self or soul and the understanding of one's outer body or matter. These two are the upper and lower natures of Brahman the Absolute. He says not to run away from the prakṛti or nature to know the puruṣa or God but to know the puruṣa or God or Eternity through the discriminatory knowledge of His temporal prakriti or nature. The knowledge of the temporality of the five material elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether—and their corresponding senses—touch, taste, sight, smell, and sound—directs us to realize the nonmaterial self or soul in order to reach God or Eternity.

Arjuna, warrior the great, has deviated from the right path of niṣkāma karma-yoga in the midst of the battle, as many of us do in our worldly affairs. As a bewildered person, he rushes to Jñāneśvara Kṛṣṇa and asks Him in wonder about the ultimate Reality, life hereafter, the phenomenal world, God, and so on and so forth. There is sincerity in his search, ardency and honesty in his approach. There is no show or artificiality in the Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna dialogue. It is a dialogue between Jñāneśvara Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of jñāna, and jijñāsu Arjuna, the seeker of jñāna.

Here Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches the meaning of Ātman or the inner self who is no other than immanent Brahman. This individual self is immortal, but the body, which is the cover of the self, is mortal. Here Kṛṣṇa teaches the reality of the immortality and the mortality of the two parts of Brahman the Absolute. Ātman, which is the spiritual or

the subtlest part of Brahman, is indestructible. Whereas the body, which is the material or the gross part of Brahman, is perishable. Kṛṣṇa wants Arjuna to understand the immortality of soul and fight his enemies in the battle-field with a clear knowledge of life and death. He strengthens the morale of disheartened Arjuna who is afraid of killing his own kith and kin. On the theory of the immortality of soul and the mortality of body, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that soul never dies and body is ever perishable. Hence Arjuna will never kill the soul of his enemies. All he will do is to be a medium of removing the old bodies from the immortal souls of his enemies who are destined to die sooner or later, and by doing so, Arjuna will not be doing any sinful act. He will simply perform his duty according to his nature (svabhāva) and religion (svadharma) and at the end will be known as the hero of the Mahābhārata. Lord Kṛṣṇa describes the indestructibility of soul and the perishability of body :

vāsāṁsi jīrnāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛhṇātī naro 'pāṛani
tathā śarīrānī vihāya jirnāny
anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehi

nai 'naṁ chindanti śastrāni
nai 'naṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cai 'naṁ kledayanty āpo
na śoṣayati mārutah

(B. G, II-22-23)

Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new.

Weapons do not cleave this self, fire does not burn him ; waters do not make him wet ; nor does the wind make him dry. (S. R.)

Śaṁkara (788-820 A. D.) and Vivekananda (1863-1902 A. D.) were great jñāna-yogins of their time. After dis-

cerning the world of eternity from the world of temporality, they set their ultimate goal of eternity first for themselves and then for their fellowmen. Instead of searching Brahman outside, they realized the self, immanent Brahman inside, They travelled place to place, met the people of various religions and cultures, and discussed with them the philosophy of the Vedānta and the message of the Gītā. They endured real hardship in their missionary work with a view to remove the spiritual bankruptcy of the people.

The Bhakti-yoga or the way of devotion is one of the three ways which lead to the goal of liberation, mokṣa, nirvāṇa, or Brahmānanda. One should choose the spiritual path according to one's nature and aptitude.

Through this path of devotion, the devotee needs simply to surrender himself to his personal God or Īśvara (iṣṭa devatā). Fundamentally, he will have to discover his best spiritual inclination according to his nature (svabhāva) and religion (svadharma), i.e. whether he has emotional attachment with the gods and goddesses of the Hindus, the Buddha of the Buddhists, Moses of the Jews, Christ of the Christians, Mohammed of the Moslems, and so on. Once he settled that, he should try to determine particular deity or prophet as the symbol or object of his adoration. An ardent devotee will surrender his entire life to his adored deity or prophet. Thereon a true devotee does not live for himself but for his beloved god or goddess. He dines with his adored spiritual symbol ; he drinks with him ; he dances with him ; he lives with him ; and finally he dies with him.

What is called self-realization for the jñāna-yogin or the wise man is called God-realization for the bhakta or devotee. As a matter of fact, all the eighteen chapters of the Gītā place the philosophy of the bhakti-yaga at the top, but the last six chapters have specially dealt with this path or mārga. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that among all the yogins, the bhakta or devotee is most appealing to Him. All jñāna-yogins, karma-yogins, and bhakti-yogins are

equally liked by Him, but a bhakta or devotee who has surrendered everything to him and who has no other possession than Him is preferable to Him. Lord Kṛṣna says:

> And of all yogins, he who full of faith worships Me, with his inner self abiding in Me, him, I hold to be the most attuned (to me in Yoga). (B. G. VI-47) (S.R,)

The path of devotion is the theistic method of attaining the Ultimate goal. Here the devotee has unshakable faith in his worshipped God. It is not the fact that he hates other deities against his own. He simply sees his adored deity in all deities. Śrī Aurobindo describes in his book 'The Gita':

> The supreme faith is that which sees God in all and to its eye the manifestation and the non-manifestation are one Godhead. He is Purushottama, Parmeshvara and Parmatman and in all these equal aspects the same single and eternal Godhead.[14]

The all pervading Brahman is personal to a bhakta or devotee. He has personified the Infinite into the finite form. The idea of the Infinite into the finite, Impersonal Brahman into personal God, sounds ridiculous, impractical, but it is not so in its depth as it looks on the surface, In the eyes of the devotee or bhakta the Impersonal and the personal are not two but one. Through the finite idol of Siva or Kṛṣṇa, the Saivite or Kṛṣṇite does not see anything else but the Supreme. Omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient Brahman is super-imposed in the devotee's statue of Siva or Kṛṣṇa. The devotee has enshrined his worshipped statue with the human feelings of love, anger, attachment, and despair. He laughs a little and cries a little with his adored symbolic statue. A true devotee like

14, Anibaran Roy (ed.), *The Gita*, by Sri Aurobindo Ghose (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1938), p, 199.

Rāmakṛṣṇa emotionally compels his Supreme Lord to descend in that statue for him, and for the sake of His devotee, the Supreme manifests there at the zenith of His devotee's devotion or bhakta's bhakti. Lord Kṛṣṇa's great declaration of "ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathai 'va bhajāmy aham, As men approach me so do I accept them" (B. G. IV-11) is always the lighthouse for a true devotee. The Gīiā says :

> He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me ; I am not lost to him nor is he lost to me. (B. G. VI-30) (S. R.)

Finally, I shall say that sincerity in search and honesty in faith are the fundamental aspects of the Bhagavadgītā. The true seeker of Truth must have concentration of mind and purification of soul as the basic requirement, whether he is a jñana-yogin, a karma-yogin, or a bhakti-yogin. When a steadfast devotee like Arjuna will have the compassionate teaching of a teacher like Lord Kṛṣṇa, he is sure to have lawful progress and honourable prosperity here and eternal bliss of Brahmānanda hereafter. The Gītā says in its last verse :

> yatra yogeśvarah kṛṣṇo
> yatra pārtho dhānurdharaḥ
> tatra śrir vijayo bhūtir
> dhruvā nītir matir mama
>
> (B. G. XVIII-78)

> Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of yoga, and Partha (Arjuna), the archer, I think, there will surely be fortune, victory, welfare and morality. (S. R.)

Chapter VII

NĀGĀRJUNA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Śūnyatā, the emptiness, or the void is the reality of Nāgārjuna's philosophy. The second century Buddhist Nāgārjuna is the greatest intellectual Buddhism has ever produced. He was an independent Buddhist thinker and had indubitable conviction in the enlightening teachings of the Buddha. Instead of following the triadic principles of the Trīpiṭaka—Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma—or the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṁgha—as taught by the Buddha for the realization of the Truth (Nirvāṇa), Nāgārjuna applies his dialectic method to make the people uuderstand and not merely believe the futility of the worldly things they care for. He endeavors real hard to prove the emptiness or the śūnyatā of the world (saṁsāra). He is not at all pedantic in his philosophical approach towards the reality. He is sincere in his logical interpretation of Buddhism as taught and realized by Gautama Buddha, the Exalted One. K. V. Ramanan writes on Nāgārjuna's Buddhism :

> While Nāgārjuna as a Buddhist philosopher has few equals in the history of Buddhism, there has been hardly another personality so elusive as his.........However, works like the Mādhyamika-Kārikā testify by their very existence to the historicity of their author who is indisputedly known as Nāgārjuna, the great Buddhist philosopher who trod the path of prajñapāramitā and wrote even Karika in order to expound the basic teachings of Prajñapāramitā-Sūtras.[1]

1, K. V; Ramanan, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajnaparamita-Sastra* (Vermont: Chartes E. Tuttle Company, Inc. 1966) p. 25.

According to Nāgārjuna, the Buddha's Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path for the attainment of Nirvāña is nothing but the realization of "the emptiness" or "the śūnyatā" of the world we live in. The understanding of this emptiness of the things is the same as the experience of Buddha's Nirvāṇa. Where the Buddha introduces the triadic code of śīla, prajña, and samādhi to be practised for the realization of the ultimate reality, Nāgārjuna applies his dialectic to understand that goal. Where the language of the Buddha was silence in answering the metaphysical questions of spatio-temporal causality, Nāgārjuna uses his symbolic logic of negativism or not this and not that. It can be said that where the Buddha denies to be positive about the nature of the things, Nāgārjuna affirms the emptiness or the śūnyatā of the things.

The Nirvāṇa of the Buddha is not, as a matter of fact, an attainment of any concrete substance but the realization of the truth of total detachment from the spatio-temporal world. The same goal of total detachment is attained by the understanding of the emptiness, voidness, or śūnyatā of the mundane (sāṁsāric) things. Both the Buddha and Nāgārjuna reach the same summit of permanent cessation of suffering but through different processes, one applying the ethical code and the other applying the dialectic. The Buddha's renunciation of the world and the realization of Nirvāṇa reflect nothing but the non-substantiality (śūnyatā) of the world (saṁsāra). If the worldly things would have been substantial or non-empty, the Prince Siddhārtha would not have renounced them and devoted his entire life in teaching effectively the gospel of deachment to such a vast number of followers. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on the renunciation of the Buddha.

> Impressed by the emptiness of the things of sense, he renounced the ease, power, and wealth of the palace to meditate on the eternal and open for his fellowmen an escape from the meanness of life and the illusions of flesh. In those days seekers

> after truth, haunted and obsessed by mental unrest, used to become wandering hermits. The seeker for light must begin his search by a repudiation of the good things of the world. In conformity with the ancient custom Buddha left his home and adopted the ascetic's life. [2]

It was not Buddha's mysticism or magic that led his teaching spread far and wide in Asia and Europe. Countries after countries took refuge in the triadic Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṁgha—not out of courtesy or ignorance but on the understanding of the truth of Buddha's teaching, and that truth was nothing but the realization of the non-substantiality, the emptiness, or the śūnyatā, says Nāgārjūa.

Nāgārjuna was a well educated South Indian Brāhmin who lived in India in the second century A. D. His life in detail is described by Kumārjīva who translated Nāgārjuna's biography in Chinese in 401 A. D. Some historians write that Nāgārjuna converted Dhorabhadra who lived in 50 B. C., and, therefore, it is obvious to say that Nāgārjuna must have lived some where around four hundred years after the Buddha. T. R. V. Murti writes about Nāgārjuna's life and philosophy :

> Though the traditions of his life are greatly overlaid with legendary details, there is no reason to doubt that Nagarjuna was a real person. The circumstaces of his life are briefly told. He was, in all probability, a Brahman from the South who came to Nālandā and propagated the new prajña-pāramitā teaching. The legend which credits him with having brought the satasahasrikā from the abode of the Nāgās means that he was the founder of a new and important phase in Buddhism.

2, S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. I (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 348.

> All our accounts agree in connecting his abode with Dhanyakataka or Śriparvata in the South, and of his personal friendship with the King Satavāhana (Āndhra) for whom he wrote Suhrllekha. Tradition places him four hundred years after the parinirvāṇa of the Lord, whereas the consensus of opinion among European scholars is that he lived about the middle of the 2nd century A. D. [3]

There are various opinions on the literary works of Nāgārjuna. Undoubtedly, there is a great number of books written by and attributed to Nāgārjuna. Many of those books were lost after the fall of Buddhism in India. Chandra kīrti, Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, and Kūmārjīva are the main commentators on Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy or the Middle Path. According to Murti, Robinson, and some other writers, there are six books written by Nāgārjuna. (1) Prajña-Mūla (Mūla-Mādhyamika-Kārikās), (2) Śūnyatā-Saptati, (3) Yukti-saṣtikā, (4) Vigraha Vyāvartani, (5) Vaidalya-Sūtra and Prakaraṇa, (6) Vyavahāra-siddhi.

After the Parinirvāṇa (physical death) of the Buddha in the year 483 B. C., the followers of the Buddha, who were called Theravādins (the elderly persons), started having different opinions regarding the philosophy of the Buddha. They called a meeting of the Buddhists, Mahāsaṁgha, at the Council of Vaiśāli to discuss the meaning and purpose of Buddhism. They were divided into many schools on the subject matter of Buddha's teaching. Four main Buddhist schools sprang out of that Mahasaṁgha: Two of them fall in the group of Hīnayāna (small vehicle) and the other two are in the group of Mahāyāna (great vehicle). The Hīnayāna group is composed of Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas who are called realists or Sarvastivādins who believe in the psycho-physical existence of everything. The Mahāyāna group comprised the Yogacāras, who were

3. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 87-88.

idealists or Vijñānvādins, and the Mādhyamikas, who were nihilists or Śūnyavādins.

Nāgārjuna is the greatest advocate of Mādhyamika philosophy which believes in the Middle Path. His Middle Path is opposed to any extreme of either positivism or of negativism, skepticism or absolutism. The Mādhyamika philosophy is not the philosophy of nothingness as it is popular among the laymen. It preaches the theory of "emptiness" or "śūnyatā" which is a symbolic expression given by the finite to the infinite. The emptiness or śūnyatā does not mean whether the world is real or nonreal (satya or asatya), being or non-being (bhava or abhava). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the śūnyata of Nāgārjuna:

> To the Mādhyamikas reason and language apply only to the finite world. To transfer the finite categories to the infinite would be like attempting to measure the heat of the sun by the ordinary thermometer. From our point of view the absolute is nothing. We call it śūnya, since no category used in relation to the conditions of the world is adequate to it. To call it being is wrong, because only concrete things are. To call it non-being is equally wrong. [4]

The Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna is a critical analysis of the Abhidharma texts and a logical interpretation of the Prajñapāramitā texts which developed in India on the thesis of the Buddha's Dharma, the law of nature. Nāgārjuna did not accept the contemporary philosophy of Buddhism for granted. At the time of Nāgārjuna, the philosophy of the Buddha had deteriorated from its original purity. The various schools of Buddhism started interpreting the purity of the Buddha's wisdom according to their own dogmatic and sectarian thoughts, and the teaching of the Buddha no longer remained an enligh-

4. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol I (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966) p. 663.

tened philosophy of suchness or Tathatā, Liberation or Nirvāṇa, Emptiness or Śūnyatā. The empirical (saṁvṛiti) understanding of the dharmas (the law of nature) was getting replaced by the realists, Vaibhāṣikas ; the mentalists, Sautrāntikas , or the subjectivists, yogacāras. They started analysing the elements of dharmas (dhātus, skandhas, and āyatanas) instead of synthesizing them for ths best. In the matter of the nature of the dharmas (the material elements), the Enlightened One always kept silent, not because he was ignorant but to avoid unnecessary and misleading discussion. He always dealt wisely. His teaching deals with the wisdom and not the load of knowledge. When the wisdom of the Buddha was misunderstood and misinterpreted as the knowledge of the world (saṁsāra), then the theory of emptiness or the śūnyavāda of Nāgārjuna emerged on the Indian scene to revive the reality of the Buddha's teaching, Dr. Radhakrishnnn describes the meaning behind the emptiness of the Mādhyamika school in relation to other schools of Buddhism :

> This view, that the world with its suns and stars is nothing more than a baseless appearance, is quite in consonance with the popular classification of the four Buddhist schools into the Vaibhāṣikas, or presentationists, who accept the perceptibility of external objects ; the Sautrāntikas, or representationists ; the Yogacāras, or subjectivists ; and the Mādhyamikas, or nihīlists. But we do not think that this view is true to the teaching of Nāgārjuna, who is not the common conjurer who wishes to prove that the chair we sit on is not a chair. Existence is the only possible sense of continuous production of phenomena he admits, though he denies to it absolute reality.[5]

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol, I (London ; George Allen & Unwin. 1966) p. 662,

The reality behind the śūnyatā or emptiness of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy is "pratītyasamutpāda" or the dependent origination. Nothing is absolute. Everything is dependent on something else. This phenomenal world is based on the interrelationship. Nāgārjuna says that we do not know whether the phenomena of the world are spiritual or material, because all are dependent on each other. Somebody's father is somebody's son. The seed of a tree becomes the tree for another seed ad infinitum. In this circle of interdependence, there is no being but becoming. The interdependent becoming has no beginning and no end.

According to the principle of becoming, there is no cause separate from its effect. By means of his dialectic method, Nāgārjuna tries to prove the emptiness of the absolute being and the relativity of the becoming. He denies the self-existence (svabhāva) of a thing, All things are interrelated because there is nothing essentially real. Dialectically Nāgārjuna endeavors to explain in his Mādhyamikakārikā that there is no existence (bhava) without self-existence (svabhāva), but it is known through the theory of dependent origination or pratītyasmutpāda that there is no self-existence or self-substantiality. If there is no self-existence (svabhāva) in the existence (bhava), how can there be other-existence (prabhāva) or non-existence (abhāva). Everything is śūnya or empty of its own substantiality. Nāgārjuna dialectically approaches his argument in the first chapter of his Mādhyamikakārika :

1. Never are any existing things found to originate. From themselves, from something else, from both, or from no cause.

2. There are four conditioning causes ; A cause (hetu), objects of sensations, "immediately preceding condition," and of course the predominant influence—there is no fifth.

3. Certainly there is no selfexistence (svabhāva) of existing things in conditioning causes, etc. And if no self-existence exists, neither does "other-existence (prabhāva)."[6]

According to the logical interpretation of the dharmas (the natural elements) in Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamikakārikā, there is nothing absolute or self-existent (svabhāva). He argues that if a thing is self-existent, then there is no reason to think that the particular thing is produced or destroyed, because a self-existent thing is neither born nor destroyed. But, as a matter of fact, in our experience we find that a thing comes and goes. Nāgārjuna argues that this coming and going (gatāgata) is the process of becoming of the dhātus (matter). The combination of the elements (saṁskṛata dhātus) is the cause of the name (nāma) and form (rūpa) of the perceived things. The condition of the five material elements or skandhas (fire, water, air, earth, and sky) and one mental element, cit or consciousness, takes the form of a living being. The separation of these material and mental elements is the death or deformation of that living being. Thus the world of ours is simply the process of integration and segregation. Nothing is permanent. The world is the flux of interrelated origination.

The world is not real, or unreal, or both, or none. It is entirely phenomenal. One is causing the appearance of something which in turn causes something else to appear ad infinitum. There is no past or future because time does not exist in the continuity of the infinity. Time and space are simply the succession of events and elements. In this process of events and elements, there is no eternity or annihilation. There is no reality or non-reality. Everything is śūnya, or empty, says Nāgārjuna. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes :

> In the very first stanza of his Mādhyamika Sāstra he says : "There is no death, no

6. Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness*, (New. York : Abingdon Press, 1967) p. 183.

> birth, no distinction, no persistence, no oneness, no manyness, no coming in, no going forth." There is nothing real...... The world has only phenomenal existence and things are neither transient nor eternal, neither produced nor destroyed, neither the same nor different, neither coming forth nor passing away, except in appearance. The world is nothing more than an ideal system of qualities and relations. We believe in relations which can not be intelligently explained.[7]

According to Nāgārjuna's dialectic of relativity, there is no self-existing subject, object, or their relation. Actor, act, and the object acted upon are interrelated. He says that it is impossible to have a seer without his sight and seeing, and as the sight is non-existent without seer and his seeing, so is the seeing non-existent without the seer and the sight. How to say which is first and which is last in this world of relativity? Whether the egg came first or the chicken? In order to prove the śūnyatā or emptiness of the existence, Nāgārjuna gives an analogy of fire and kindling in one of the chapters of his Mādhyamika Sāstra:

(MK-X)

12. Fire does not exist in relation to kindling; and fire does not exist unrelated to kindling. Kindling does not exist in relation to fire; and kindling does not exist unrelated to fire.

13. Fire does not come from something else; and fire does not exist in kindling. The remaining [analysis) in regard to kindling is described by (the analysis of) "that which

7. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966) p. 655.

is being gone to," "that which is gone to," and "that which is not yet gone to."

14. Fire is not identical to kindling, but fire is not in anything other than kindling. Fire does not have kindling as its property; also the kindling is not in fire and vice versa.[8]

Nāgārjuna does not deny the existence (bhava) of the things. He does not also affirm the non-existence (abhāva) of the things. He denies the self-existence (svabhāva) of the things and advocates the śūnyatā or emptiness of the things. The things have dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda) caused by the interdependence (prabhāva) of cause and effect. On the basis of this emptiness of the things, there is no duḥkha, karma, Nirvāṇa, or even Buddha. There is no self-existent kartā or producer, karma or product, and kṛyā or producing. Nāgārjuna says in his Mādhyamikakārikā :

(MK VIII)

12. The Producer proceeds being dependent on the product, and the product proceeds being dependent on the producer.

(MK XII)

1, Some say : Sorrow (duḥkha) is produced by oneself, or by another, or by both (itself and another), or from no cause at all. But (to consider) that (sorrow) as what is produced is not possible.

2. If it were produced by itself it would not exist dependent on something else. Certainly those "groups of universal elements" (skandhas) exist presupposing these "groups"

(MK XXII)

2. If the Buddha exists dependent on the "groups," then he is not "that which exists

8. Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967) pp. 195-196.

by itself" (svabhāva). And how can he exist as something else (prabhāva) if he is not "that which exists by itself?"

(MK XXV)

6. But if Nirvāṇa is an existing thing, how could [Nirvāṇa] exist without dependence (on something else)? Certainly nirvāṇa does not exist as something without dependence.[9]

These above mentioned quotations from Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika Sāstra explain again the interdependence of the things, their dependent origination or pratītyasamutpāda. It supports the relativity of the universe and denies its absolute existence. Cold exists in comparison to heat, night in relation to day, good in opposition to bad, positivism in contrary to negativism, and so on. They do not exist absolutely. The existence of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, without the existence of the non-Buddha, the unenlightened one is beyond definition. Gautama Buddha would not have tried to go in search of the spiritual light if he would not have been fed-up with the existing material darkness. He would not have experienced the bliss of Nirvāṇa if Nirvāṇa would not be existing side by side with the suffering or duḥkha of the saṁsāra. The appearance of one is the disappearance of the other. There is no absolute being or non-being. Everything is becoming, and this becoming is absolutely relative according to Nāgārjuna's interpretation of the Buddha's teaching of the Mādhyam Mārga or the Middle Path.

One should not misunderstand Nāgārjuna's denial of the self-existence (svabhāva) of the Buddha, Dharma, or Nirvāṇa, as he argues in his Mādhyamikakārikā. He is a logical interpretor of the Buddha's teaching of the Middle Path or the Mādhyam Mārga. His Mādhyamikakārikā and Vigrahavyāvartani texts are entirely devoted to

9. Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness*, New Yourk : Abingdon Press, 1967) pp. 193-209.

prove and interpret the Middle Path of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. What the Buddha called Nirvāṇa and his follower Aśvaghosh called suchness or tathatā, Nāgārjuna called śūnyatā, void, or emptiness, The reality of Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā is the absolute relativity or dependent origination (pratityasamutpāda). The changeability or becoming is the reality of the universe.

Like the Buddha, Nāgārjuna believes in two kinds of truth : the mundane truth and the supermundane truth. He does not want the people to be confused between these two levels of truth. The mundane truth is that which we experience in our daily life (samvṛiti), and the supermundane truth is the ultimate truth (pāramārthic) which is beyond ordinary experience. The Buddha called the mundane truth saṁsāra, and the ultimate truth Nirvāṇa. The Buddha wanted the ultimate truth of Nirvāṇa to be achieved through physical-mental control. Nāgārjuna wanted that truth to be understood through logical discourse. He always alarms the people not to mistake the ultimate truth for the mundane truth. This mistaking of the ultimate for the temporal is like perceiving the snake in the rope and the moon in the water. He endeavors to correct this shadowy knowledge of the truth. In his Mādhyamikakārikā, he talks about the Buddha's teaching in relation to these two truths :

(MK. XXIV)

8. The teaching of the Buddha of the Dharma has recourse to two truths : the world-truth and the truth which is the highest sense.

9. Those who do not know the distribution (vibhagam) of the two kinds of truth do not know the profound "point" (tattva) in the teaching of the Buddha.

10. The highest sense (of the truth) is not taught apart from practical behavior. And

without having understood the highest sense one can not understand Nirvāṇa,

11. Emptiness, having been dimly perceived, utterly destroys the slow-witted. It is like a snake wrongly grasped or (magical) knowledge incorrectly applied.[10]

By defining the two kinds of truth, the mundane and the ultimate, in his Kārikā, Nāgārjuna clears up the misunderstanding of nihilism stamped on his Buddhist philosophy of śūnyatā. He does not introduce any new tenet but the tactics. His approach to the goal of ultimate reality takes a new avenue. The principle of relativity or non-absolutism is the same. The ultimate goal of Nirvāna is the same. The empirical world or saṁsāra is also the same. The method is different. One is meditative and the other is intellectual. Where the Buddha applies the method of intuition for the realization of the ultimate, Nirvāṇa, Nāgārjuna follows the dialectic method for the understanding of the ultimate. Nāgārjuna removes all the obstacles of dogmatic attachments and orthodox faiths from the ultimate reality of the unconditioned conditionedness. K. V. Ramanan gives a comparative analysis of Nāgārjuna and the Buddha :

Nāgārjuna and the Buddha :

Thus the conceptions of "conditioned origination" and the Middle Way. which were accepted by all the Buddhist schools as basic to the teachings of the Buddha and which must have found their place in all the "collections" of his teaching, were apparently worked out by Nāgārjuna along the lines suggested above. For him they yield truth of conditionedness of determinate entities and the relativity of specific concepts and conceptual

10. Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness*, (New York : Abingdon Press, 1967) p. 213.

> systems; they bear again the all important truth that the conditioned is not ultimate in its conditioned nature or that the conditionedness of the conditioned is not its ultimate nature, but that in its ultimate nature, the conditioned is itself the unconditioned reality. And he finds in them what he considers as their most basic conception, viz., the distinction of the mundane and the ultimate. Thus he says in the Kārikā: "My teachings of the Buddha are based on two truths, the mundane and the ultimate. Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths do not understand the profound meaning, in the teachings of the Bnddha." [11]

Nāgārjuna's theory of void or śūnyatā does not deny the existence. All the physical and mental elements of existence (dhātus, skandhas, and āyatans) do exist, but they do not exist absolutely. They exist as becoming and not as being. Their existence is based on their function. The element that does not function either as a subject or as an object is beyond perception. Without the relativity based on the function of the elements of existence, the infinite world of ours is impossible to exist indefinitely. Without interrelation, sooner or later, they will exhaust their potentialities, and the world of ours will cease to exist for ever. It is the non-substantiality or the śūnyatā of the individual elements of existence which allows them to overlap on each other for their continuity. It is their interdependence (naihsvabhāvya) that keeps them alive and moving. The coming and going, the appearances and disappearances of the various composite (saṁskṛata) things

11. K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajnaparamita Sastra* (Vermont; Charles E. Tuttle Company. 1966), p. 53.

are not possible if they are already perfect. An absolute reality or perfection does not have to play the game of appearing and disappearing for its recreation. The game of hide and seek is an imperfect game done for the pleasure of the relatives. It is the relative nature of the elements (dharmas) that keep them functioning or becoming. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on this Mādhyamika śūnyatā :

> The Mādhyamika, as the name implies adopts a position midway between extreme affirmation and extreme negation. If the world were real, no changes can occur in it at all. Improvement and enlightenment are possible only if the world is plastic and in a state of constant becoming. As Chandrakīrti, commenting on Nāgārjuna, observes : "If everything has its own self-essence, which makes it impossible to pass from one state to another, how could a person desire to ascend, if he ever so desire, higher and higher on the scale of existence ?" We can not do anything in a world perfect and real. So it must be unreal. Nāgārjuna asks: "If you negate the doctrine of śūnyatā, you negate causation. If there were such a thing as self-essence, the multitudinousness of things must be regarded as uncreated and imperishable, which is tantamount to eternal nothingness. If there were no emptiness, there would be no attainment of what has not been attained, nor would there be the annihilation of pain nor the extinction of all the passions." [12]

Nāgārjuna's theory of śūnyatā is not a metaphysical speculation. It sees the things as they are. In the theory

12, S. Radhakrishnan. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1896) p. 646.

of relativity, there is no high jump or low jump. Everything has an interlinked process to pass through. Past is always present in the future, which means that past, present and future are interlinked. Socrates says that the present is the child of the past and is pregnant with the future. The Middle Way or the Mādhyamika view says that everything is in the middle. There is nothing that has not got the preceding and the following. Nothing is unconditioned and uncounted. In this interdependence of things, one should perceive as it is. K. V. Ramanan explains this impartial perception:

> Non-exclusiveness (śūnyatā), the Mādhyamika would say, is of the very nature of wisdom (prajña). Rejecting the error of misplaced absoluteness, he reveals the conditioned as conditioned and the unconditioned as unconditioned. In this he is doing just what the sun does. The sun does not make the high low or the low high, but just reveals the nature of things as they are, the low as low and the high as high. [13]

Nāgārjuna's doctrine of void or śūnyatā is not a theory of spiritualism or materialism, or. both, or neither. It is the combination of the two into one relativity. It is not an analytic principle but a synthetic method. Nāgārjuna's dialectic is critical of all the theories and denies to form any theory of its own. That does not mean that śūnyatā is baseless. It is the true interpretation of the Buddha's teaching of detachment (nirāśakta) from the world (saṁsāra) of suffering (duḥkha). Unlike the Vaibhāṣika and the Sautrāntika thoughts which preach the Abhidharmika theory of elements, the Mādhyamika philosophy of the void is the rejection of the absolute elements and the

13. K. V. Ramanan, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajnanparamita-Sastra*, (Vermont : Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1966), p. 42.

projection of the absolute relativity. It is the denial of the extreme eternalism and nihilism and the promotion of the Middle Way as taught by Gautama Buddha. This Mādhyamika philosophy of śūnyatā is the central philosophy of Buddhism. T. R. V. Murti writes in his book 'The Central Philosophy of Buddhism':

> Śūnyatā (Doctrine of the Void) is the pivotal concept of Buddhism. The entire Buddhist philosophy turned on this. The earlier realistic phase of Buddhism, with its rejection of substance and uncritical creation of a theory of elements, was clearly a preparation for the fully critical and self-conscious dialectic of Nāgārjuna. Not only is the Yogacāra idealism based on the explicit acceptance of Sūnyatā but the critical and absolutist trend in the atma tradition is also traceable to this. [14]

Scientifically, Nāgārjuna's theory of dependent origination or pratītyasamutpāda leads us beyond the spatio-temporal causality of the universe. The phenomenal idea of origin and end is eliminated here. Nagārjuna bases the world on the absolute ground of interlink. All phenomenal things are absolutely interdependent. The phenomenal chain of things ends to exist when we begin to analyse it. This endless chain of phenomena can be logically understood as circular contents. According to our logic, only a circular space can contain things endlessly. Our logic says that an element can not come out of something that does not exist, and if this logic is true, then the world of elements must have something behind its appearance. That something behind is nothing else understandable than the circular interlink. Logically, non-circular infinite motion is impossible to exist. Dr. A. K. Sarkar writes on Nāgārjuna's interlinked phenomena:

14. T. R. V, Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 58.

> Nāgārjuna's suggestion is that in the interlinked universe, there can be no place for discrete entities (dharma-nairātmya), or discrete intellectual form; for, the interlinked universe, finally suggests "undifferentiated existence and experience" (dharmakāyā). To Nāgārjuna, the relative existence, is borrowed existence, it is not a real existence, just as the borrowed money is not real money. The world of relativity invariably suggests a transcendent "undifferentiated existence or experience.[15]

The historical background of India says that Buddhism as religion spread in India when the Hinduism deteriorated to mere orthodoxism. The Buddha's search for truth outside the religious citadel of Hinduism shows that the traditional goal and means of the prevalent religion was not vigorous enough to enlighten the people. That was the reason why the Buddha was restless with the existing system and had to seek something different. It is not the fact that the Vedic literatures and cultures had nothing to offer to Siddhartha. He read all the Upaniṣadic and pre-Upaniṣadic texts, digested their truths, and rejected the misunderstanding about them. The Buddha never preached against the Upaniṣads, but the misrepresentation of the Upaniṣads. As he was fed-up with the traditional dogmatism, he asked his followers not to believe anything blindly, even Upaniṣads. He cared for the Light, the Truth, the Reality, and wanted everybody to do the same. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains this relationship of the Buddha with the Upaniṣads :

> It was the Buddha's mission to accept the idealism of the Upaniṣads at its best, and make it available for the daily needs of mankind. Historical Buddhism means

15. A. K. Sarkar, *Changing Phases of Buddhist Thought.* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1968), p. 36.

> the spread of the Upaniṣad doctrine among the peoples.........Buddhism, we might say, is a return of Brahmanism to its own fundamental principles.[16]

As the Buddha was the restorer of the dying spirit of the Upaniṣadic non-dualism, so was Nāgārjuna the great interpretor of the Mādhyamika gospel of the Buddha. The pre-Buddhist orthodoxism and the Vedic ritualism were similar to the Hīnāyānic misrepresentation of the pure teachings of the Buddha. The Mahāyān doctrine of Nāgārjuna's philosopy of śūnyatā or void (non-extremism) is aimed at to correct the error fallen upon the grand Middle Path of Buddhism.

The Buddha before Nāgārjuna had become merely a worshipping symbol like the Vedic deities, The idol worship began taking root in Buddhism. and the teachings of the Buddha became the mind-matter theory of the Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas. The reality of the Four Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, known as the Middle Path, were misrepresented by the various schools of Buddhism. The Vaibhāṣikas called Buddhism, Realism ; the Sautrāntikas called it, Idealism. The dogmatism, which the Buddha fought against, crept into Buddhism. The Buddha was aware of the possibility of misrepresentation of his pure presentation, and, therefore, he was teaching his gospel by setting his own examples. He lived with what he said to be the best for him and his followers. He did not say one thing and did another. His words and deeds were always complementary. Irrespective of his all these individual carefulness and moral control, the evil forces started engulfing his great teaching at the last phase of his life. When the women were allowed to be the members of the Saṁgha (Buddhist community) after the acceptance of the first lady Ambapali in the city of Vaiśāli, India, the Buddha said to Ānanda that he saw darkness

16. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 471.

ahead in the saṁgha. The deterioration started and was augmented after the Buddha.

Nāgārjuna is the Buddhist who truly understood the teachings of Lord Buddha and realized the degeneration and misrepresentation of them. Nāgārjuna took a firm stand on Buddhism and applied his dialectic method to interpret it correctly to the people. Dr. Radhakrishnan expresses his view on the relationship of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy and the Buddha's teaching of the Mādhyam Mārga, the Middle Way :

> The Mādhyamika philosophy is an ancient system which can be traced to the original teaching of Buddha. Buddha called his ethical teaching the Middle (Mādhyam) Way, and repudiated the two extremes of an exaggerated asceticism and an easy secular life. In metaphysics he condemned all extreme positions, such as that everything exists, or that nothing exists. The Mādhyamic philosophy tries to adopt the mean between extreme affirmation and extreme negation. We have in Nāgārjuna one of the greatest thinkers of India, a far more vigorous sifting of the contents of experience than we found in either the subjectivists or the realists.[17]

Thus the dialectic of Nāgārjuna which denies all the existing realistic and idealistic view of the universe and does not affirm any of its own is considered to be the philosophy of "Copernican Revolution". As the "Copernican Revolution" proved that is was the earth that revolved around the sun and not the sun around the earth, so the Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna interpreted the reality of Buddhism as śūnyatā that exists in the middle of the two extremes of eternity and annihilation and not

17. Ibid. pp. 643-644.

the vice versa. T. R. V, Murti expresses his idea on the revolutionary philosophy of Nāgārjuna's Buddhism :

> Like the Advaitism of Śaṁkara, the Mādhyamika is a revolutionary interpretation of Buddhism. It deepened Buddhism by analysing fully its implications. It is sustained attempt to synthesise the teaching of the Buddhist scriptures by the adoption of the transcendental (parmārtha) and the phenomenal (samvṛti) standpoints. Texts are divided into neyārtha and nitārtha, corresponding to Śaṁkara's distinction of parā and aparā śrutis. [18]

Nāgārjuna's dialectic is called *reductio ad absurdum* arguments (prsangapādanam) which tries to break each and every thesis and anti-thesis, positivism and negativism. The idea behind this critical view of Nāgārjuna regarding the phenomena is the concept of transcendental reality which is beyond our empirical 'yes' or 'no'. The infinite is so much transcendental that is it illogical to call it by any empirical name. It is better to reach the infinite synthetically through the process of relativity than to determine it by our finite concepts of dualism or non-dualism, realism or idealism. Our determination of the indeterminate is like the blind man's concept of the elephant. Instead of determining the reality of the infinite, it is better to get rid of the unreal finite. Nāgārjuna says that we have to give up the physical means and goals to attain that which is beyond physical, We can name the beyond God, Brahman, Substance, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-cit-ānanda), and so on, but that is simply symbolical. The Absolute is so far beyond our finite experience that it is hard to say what it is really. The Reality of the Absolute is not definitely that transcendental

18, T, R, V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.* (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 122,

which we idealize and it is of course not only that phenomenal which we realize. It is beyond our concept of the substance (ātmā) and its attributes (dharma).

According to Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika Sāstra, the reality is śūnyatā, void, or emptiness which comes in the category of relativity where things are not of their own but dependent on each other. Nothing is, as a matter of fact, essentially true. In the interdependence of the things, it is baseless to say that there is any particular thing that exists essentially. The appearance and disappearance of a thing is dependent on something else and that on something else ad infinitum. In the universality of a thing, particularity does not arise, According to Śaṁkara the particularization of the thing is due to our avidyā or ignorance, according to the Buddha it is due to indulgence, and according to Nāgārjuna it is due to misunderstanding. Mādhyamika interpretation of the Buddha's pratītyasamutpada or dependent origination says that the things are essentially universal. Dr. Dasgupta explains this śūnyatā or essencelessness of Nāgārjuna in his book 'A History of Indian Philosophy' :

> The true meaning of partītyasmutpāda or śūnyavāds is this, that there is no truth, no essence in all phenomena that appear. As the phenomena have no essence they are neither produced nor destroyed ; they really neither come nor go. They are merely the appearance of maya or illusion. The void (śūnya) does not mean pure negation, for that is relative to some kind of position. It simply means that none of the appearances have any intrinsic nature of their own (niḥsvabhāvatvam). 19

89. Surendranath Dasgupta, A *History of Indian Philosophy*' Vol. I. (Cambridge : The University Press. 1963) pp, 140-141).

The philosophy of Nāgārjuna is neither like that of Sarvāstivādins who say that everything exists, not it is on the pattern of nihilism which believes that nothing exists. It is far from modern positivism which is more or less nothing but materialism, and it can not be said a theory of nagativism or non-existence. By denying the reality of materialism, the Mādhyamika philosophy does not take shelter in spiritualism. By repudiating the concrete pluralistic view of Nyāya- Vaiśeṣikas, Nāgārjuna does not hold the abstract spiritualism of subjectivism of the Vedānta or the Yogacāra. He does not want to establish a religion of his own outside the boundary of reason. Neither does he want to take for granted the teachings of the Buddha, unlike his predecessors. He was against the conformist of any kind, Buddhist or non-Buddhist or as Lord Buddha himself was a non-conformist of the Upaniṣadic faith. That is the reason why his entire literary works, specially his Mādhyamikakārikā and Vigrahavyā-vartani, are called dialectic or logical discourse. He does not want to soar in the sky unconnected with the ground. He ventures as far as his reason takes him to. The reality beyond reason is indescribably transcendent to Nāgārjuna, similar to that of Kant's "Religion Within the Limit of Reason Only". He like Kant lives in the world of phenomena leading towards the transcendent. Mādhya-mika inexplicability of the infinite and the emptiness (śūnyatā) of the finite are more or less a philosophy of transcendentalism.

Nāgārjuna's philosophy of śūnyatā is well described in Spinoza's theory of 'determination is negation'. The indiscernibility and inexplicability of Leibnitz's monads are similar to those of void, emptiness, or śūnyatā. As the greatest number can be said only that which is multiplied by the infinity or the symholic zero (0), so the highest reality can be understood by nothing else than the śūnyatā or the void. Nāgārjuna does not agree with the monadic absolutism of Leibnitz when Leibnitz considers the monads as independent entities, but he agrees with him when he

advocates that the integration and segregation of the monads are the appearances and disappearances of them for us. Nāgārjuna's pratītyasamutpāda or dependent origination maintains the same Leibnitz's principle that there is no origination and annihilation of the things but their formation when united and deformation when disunited, When they are united at one place, they are disunited at another ad infinitum, This circular game of presence and absence of the phenomenal things are similar to the endless sunrise and the sunset. The sun does not rise or set, It is simply visible at one place when it is invisible at another.

Like the Buddha, Nāgārjuna does not believe in God. He neither affirms nor denies God, because, in his opinion, there is no need to do so. It is all waste of time and energy to think about something that is beyond thought. Śupernatural or transcendental speculation is not the job of the natural or phenomenal beings. We are fundamentally concerned with the law of nature or dharma. In the fulfillment of the natural laws by being a part of the Wheel of Law or dharmacakra, one automatically obeys the will of God who could be our beginning, our middle and our end. God has not given us any assignment to do. All we know is to follow the dharmas or the laws of nature by co-existing with nature. Nature teaches us this necessary co-existence by its natural rewards and punishments. We can live without knowing God of the theist, but we can not live for a moment by going against the dharma or the natural laws. We do not have to believe in any God of any religion to exist, but we will cease to exist if we ever try to non-cooperate with the fire, water, air, earth, and sky. We have to regard the heat of the fire, coolness of the water, the breathing power of the air, the vitalizing power of the earth, and the containing power of the sky. For the Buddha and his disciple Nāgārjuna, God is Dharma, as for Gandhi, God is Truth. If we respect Dharma, Dharma will respect us. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on Nāgārjuna's view on God :

> There is no God apart from the universe and no universe apart from God, and both are equally appearances. If Nāgārjuna thus ridicules the idea of God, let us remember that it is the deist's God that he repudiates. He is sincere in his devotion to the true God, the Dharmakāyā of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. [20]

Einstein's theory of relativity and the discovery of atom bomb can be said the actualization or the demonstration of Nāgārjuna's doctrine of pratītyasamutpāda or dependent origination. The enkindling of the atmospheric particles by the atomic explosion proves the interrelatedness of the material elements. The dialectic of Nūgārjuna endeavors to prove the same interdependence of all the dharmas (skandhas, dhātus, and āyatans) of our universe. Nāgārjuna does not agree with the theory of separate existence and indivisibility of the atoms, but he accepts their relativity and dependability. He will say that it is not logical to call an atom (aṇu) or soul (ātmā) a separate entity which has not got any essence (svabhāva) of its own. When it ceases to exist independently it is not absolute, it is relative. It is only śūnyatā or void that is absolute. The absoluteness of śūnyatā is the only reality we can deduce from this soulless (anatta), impermanent (anitya), and suffering (duḥkha) world of ours.

It is not the fact that either the Buddha or Nāgārjuna denies the world's existence. They simply deny the false understanding of the world. They do not consider it reasonable to say authoritatively that they fully undersrand the infinite. All they say is not to have a misconception of the infinite. After clearing up the unreal (anatta, anitya, duḥkha) the real is sure to shine, whatever it is. Dr, Radhakrishnan explains the reality of the absolute in the empty phenomena as discussed by the Buddha with his disciple Sāriputta :

20. S, Radhakrishnan *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1966) p. 655.

> To refuse to define the infinite spirit is not to deny it. The reality of the absolute involves the phenomenality of the world. "The skandhas are empty, all things have the character of emptiness, they have no beginning, no end, they are faultless and not faultless, they are not imperfect and not perfect, therefore, O Sāriputta, here in this emptiness there is no form, no perception, no name, no concept, no knowledge" (Large Prajñapāramitahṛdaya Sūtra p. 148 S. B. E. xlix). [21]

Finally, it can be said that Nāgārjuna's dialectic method simply refers the phenomena for the best without intending to difine, describe, or demonstrate them because they do not exist essentially (svabhāva). He accepts that the empirical (samvṛiti) truth is momentary, and the truth beyond this empirical is absolute. Instead of going after the transcendental (pāramārthic) truth, Nāgārjuna tries to unveil the misunderstood truth. He applies the negative method of unveiling the reāl than revealing the real. The emptiness or śūnyatā of the perceived things is the only absolute that can be thought of by a finite, human being. This void is beyond our notions of real and unreal, good and bad.

Nāgārjuna's absolute reality is above the knowledge of this or that, or both, or neither, Finite person's psycho-physical conception and perception will never reach the infinite. The pratītyasamutpāda or the dependent origination is the only reality we know of about the śūnya or empty world, says Nāgārjuna.

21. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol I. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1906). p. 657.

Chapter VIII

ŚAṀKARA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDĀNTIC THOUGHT

Śaṁkara (788-820 A.D.) is one of the founders of the modern Hinduism that we know of in India. From the days of the Vedas to the age of Śaṁkara, the Hinduism had deteriorated to such a degree that it was not inappropriate to call it a religion of orthodoxism and superstitions than a religion of rational Hindus. Without the spiritual reform and reasonable interpretation of the ancient Vedic truth described in the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā, the Vedic Hinduism after the dawn of Buddhism was not going to survive. By his spiritual light that he derived from the Vedic literature, Śaṁkara revived the dying faith of the Hinduism. He once more brought forth the hidden, misunderstood, and misinterpreted Reality of the Hindu culture on the surface of the land. He did not let the Divinity studded in the Vedic literature go in vain. The life-long work of the seers like Yajña-valkya, Bharadvāja, Sāndilya, Kapil, Kaṇāda, Janaka, and Vyās was not an amusing fiction to be disregarded or dumped. It was Śaṁkara's Vedāntic interpretation that enlightened the Hinduism again. Dr. Radhakrishnan expresses his view on the unmatched contribution of Saṁkara to the Hinduism :

> Śaṁkara aims at interpreting Hinduism to the new age in such a manner as to conserve, and even assert more clearly than hitherto, its distinctive message. Within this larger intention we may possibly discern the idea of unifying the people of the country. But he did not seek to bring about this unity by insisting on strict outward organization or inward beliefs.

> He tried to bring it about by a wider comprehension. By laying stress on personal character of religious experience, he broadened and spiritualized Hinduism.[1]

According to Max Müller, Keith, and many other historians of eminence, it has been confirmed that Śaṁkara (Saṁkarācārya) was born in 788 A.D. and died in 820 A.D. He came from a Brāhmin family of the learned Nambudri sect of Mālābar in South India. His ancestors were hard-working and God-fearing people. Śiva was his family deity but Śaṁkara was a Śakta (a believer of Śakti, the goddess of Power) from his childhood. He attended a Vedic school under the teachership of Govinda who was the disciple of Gauḍapāda, the founder of the Vedānta philosophy.

Śaṁkara renounced the world at a very early age, which was unusual and amazing. He travelled widely all over the country as a learned reformer. He discussed and debated his Vedantic non-dualism (Advaita Vedānta) with all prominent orthodox and heterodox believers and non-believers. In the course of his religious debates, Śaṁkara did not want to impose his point of view on his opponents. He simply wanted to convince them and win their hearts and minds. His method of philosophical dialogue brought the renowned Buddhists like Kumāril and Mandan Miśra in his side, who later became great pillars of Śaṁkara's non-dualism. For the protection of the Hindu Dharma from the inside heresies and outside communal invasions, Śaṁkara founded four monasteries or mutts as the spiritual lighthouses at four main corners of India—at Badrināth, at Puri, at Dvārakā, and at Śriṅgeri. As regards Śaṁkara's achievements in such a short span of life, Dr. Radhakrishnan writes:

> In a few years Śaṁkara practised several careers, each enough to satisfy an

1, S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2, (8th Impression : London : George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 654.

> ordinary man. His great achievement in the field of speculation is the Advaita system which he developed by means of commentaries on the ancient texts. He found it the best way to reconcile contemporary standards of knowledge and belief with the ancient texts and traditions. [2]

The philosophy of Śaṁkara is called the Advaita Vedānta. The Vedāntic Advaitism or non-dualism is the foundation of Śaṁkara's school of thought that flourished after him then and now. All other Vedāntic schools that are posterior to Śaṁkara, like the qualified non-dualism or the Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda of Rāmānuja, the dualism or the Dvaita-vāda of Mādhava, and the dual-non-dual or the Dvaitādvaitavāda of Nimbārka, are very much influenced by the non-dualism or the Advaitism of Saṁkara. Any one who will reason with compassion will appreciate the universality of Śaṁkar's Vedāntic philosophy, as it is free from dogma, doubt, and superstition.

Śaṁkara's Vedantic Advaitism or non-dualism is not inimical to the contemporary thoughts. Among the literary works of Śaṁkara, there are the main commentaries on the principal Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgitā, and Vedānta Sūtra. Upadeśasahaśri and the Vivekachudamani are the books attributed to him. They are the collected teachings of Śaṁkara. As a prayer to the gods and goddesses, Śaṁkara has also composed some hyms of great spiritual appeal, such as Dakṣināmūrti Stotra, Harimide Stotra. Ānanda Lahari, and Saundarya Lahari. Innumerable books and commentaries are also attributed to him, such as Ātmabodh, Mohamudgara, Dassloki, Aparokṣānubhuti, Viṣṇusahasranāma, and Sanatsujātīya. There are great many commentaries and sub-commentaries on Śaṁkara's commentaries. The multi-sided talent of Śaṁkara is best described by Dr. Radhakrishnan:

> The life of Śaṁkara makes a strong

2 Ibid., p. 449.

> impression of contraries. He is a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer. Such diverse gifts did he possess that different images present themselves, if we try to recall his pesonality. One sees him in youth, on fire with intellectual ambition, a stiff and interpid debater; another regards him as a shrewd political genius, attempting to impress on the people a sense of unity ; for a third, he is a calm philosopher engaged in the single effort to expose the contradictions of life and thought with an unmatched incisiveness ; for a fourth, he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know. There have been few minds more universal than his.[3]

The Vedāntā is the logical interpretation of the Vedic Reality. Literally, the word Vedānta means the end of the Veda (vedasya antaḥ). It is the conclusion of the Vedic philosophy. In other words, the Vedānta is the simplification of ceremonial and ornamental religion of the Vedas. It removes the mere ritualism and dogmatism of the degenerated Vedas. Sophisticated priesthood and commercial performances of the Vedic chanting for this worldly or other worldly gain were hard hit by the Vedāntic reformers. All the Vedāntins accept the authority of the four Vedas (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva) in the matter of discovered knowledge of Brahman the Absolute. They all agree with unbelievable power of the Vedic performances for the attainment of this worldly and heavenly gain as described by the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā of Jaimini. The miraculous achievements (fire in the water, walking on the fire, etc.) and supernatural deeds (metamorphosis; invisibility, etc.) done according to the correct performances of the Vedic rites

3. Ibid., p. 450

are not denied by the Vedāntins. They simply say that such temporal achievements are not enough. They emphasize the other part of the Vedas which deals with Brahman the Absolute. The Upaniṣadic declaration of "Brahman the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinite, satyam jñānam anantam brahma" (T. U. II-I-I) is the philosophical goal of Bādarāyana, Śaṁkara, and their followers. Instead of being satisfied with the temporal prosperity here and in the heaven, the Vedāntic giants aimed at the eternal happiness beyond time and space. The knowledge of the temporality of the finite world (Brahman's Māyā) and the eternity of the Infinite Brahman is the highest achievement of the Vedānta deduced from the Vedas. Chāndogya Upaniṣad says: "nalpe sukham asti, bhūmaiva sukham. There is no happiness in anything small (finite). Only the infinite is happiness" (C. U. VII-23-1). Dr. Radhakrishnan explains Śaṁkara's view on this Vedāntic temporality and eternity:

> According to Saṁkara, the contents and aims of the Pūrva and the Uttara Mīmāṁsā are independent. The former investigates the question of man's duty and holds before our vision a future world dependent on our conduct here on earth. The highest happiness it presents is but transitory. The Vedānta, on the other hand, helps us to the realization of the truth. Its goal is not happiness on earth or heaven (abhyūdaya), but freedom from rebirth (niḥśreyasa). [4]

Thus, according to the Advaita philosophy of Śaṁkara, the Vedānta concludes the Vedas with the knowledge of one Absolute Brahman, He is one without a second, ekam evādvitīyam (C. U. VI-2-1). He includes everything we perceive and we do not perceive. This Absolute Brahman

4. Ibid., pp; 473-474.

is formless (nirākāra) and without attributes (nirguṇa). He is the container, the sustainer, and the contents. There is nothing outside Him. He is both inside and outside, above and below, behind and beyond. Unity in diversity is like two sides of the same coin. The first sūtra or the verse of the Īśa Upaniṣad is one of the most chanted verses of the Upaniṣads in India. It was one of the verses of Mahatma Gandhi's daily prayer too. It basically upholds Śaṁkara's philosophy of Advaitism or non-dualism and śaṁnyas or renunciation. It says :

> īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvam
>   yat kiṁ ca jagatyaṁ jagat
> ten tyaktena bhuñjīthā,
>   mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam.
>   (Īśa I)

> (Know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation ; do not covet what belongs to others. (S. R.)

According to Śaṁkara, Brahman is both transcendent and immanent. The knowledge of transcendent Brahman who is formless (nirākāra) and attributeless (nirguṇa) is almost impossible to have with one's formed mind and attributed body. One has to go beyond one's finite boundary to know Brahman the Infinite, but the immanent Brahman can be known within one's psycho-physical boundary if one searches inside and realizes one's self or Ātman, says Śaṁkara. The Infinite Brahman is like a vast ocean which is not easy to fathom, but one can enjoy swimming and fishing in it at the shore. The realization of the individual self is the realization of the universal Self. That thou art, tat tvam asi (C.U. VI-8-7) is the declaration of Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedānta. One who fails to see the candle-light will never understand the day-light. Inner self, soul, or Ātman is Brahman according to the non-dualistic philosophy of the Vedānta.

Fundamentally, the philosophy of the Advaita Vedānta, derived from the Vedas, is the scientific theory of human life ever brought forth. It is a reformed Hunduism which has merged its dogmatic differences and broadened its horizon of the brotherhood of man to such a point that we can have a vision thereof nothing but universalism or oneness. It crosses the borders of the orthodox theism of the sects, heterodox individualism of the ascetics, and the helplessness of the atheists. It has paved the way for all the religions and theories to have their easy access to its wide entrance for their progress in unity and not in unifomity. Vedāntin Gerald Heard writes on the scientific approach of the Vedānta :

> The Vedānta having a world-picture which counsels against impatience and rashness, and having a psychology which shows how men may test truth and, further, may change their characters and their consciousness, not only avoid tolerance but has a scientific case for tolerance.[5]

It is not the gross quantity of the mass that counts in the gospel of the Vedāntic trinity or the prasthān traya (the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā). It is the Brāhmanic quality of the individuals revealed in the realization of their selves. It is the identification of the individual self with the universal Self that counts. Brahman-Ātman-Unity or Brahmātmaikyam is the goal of Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedānta. Here lies the Vedāntic Advaitism, when the individual self breaks all the dividing barriers of the outside appearances and merges himself in the Self of the universe. Thus the duality ceases to exist and the non-duality is experienced all over. The Upaniṣadic philosophy of "sarvam khalv idaṁ brahma, this whole world is Brahman" (C.U. III-I4-1) comes true.

In the Advaitism of Śaṁkara, the concept of individual self or Ātman plays the main role all through. The Īśa

5. Christopher Isherwood (ed)., *Vedanta for the Western World,* essay by Gerald Heard (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 54.

Upaniṣad says : "so'ham asmi, I am He" (Īśa 16). A non-dualist will not proceed an inch without depending undoubtedly on his inner self. He builds everything on and around his spirit. As the charity begins at home, so does the knowledge of Brahman the Supreme and His world of Māyā begins after the knowledge of one's inner self. Descartes' philosophy of "cogito ergo sum" emphasizes the same Vedāntic thought of self-realization. Everything can be doubted but not one's own self. The denial of one's self is contradictory, because by denying it one simply affirms it. The individual self or the universal Self is a metaphysical reality. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains Śaṁkara's view on the self :

> This Self, Ś. says, 'the unconditioned, markless, free from the characters of existent and non-existent is real metaphysically'......If the Self were not immediately manifested the whole world would become blind. Conciousness is the very essence of self as heat is of fire according to Ś. While the content of experience changes, the consciousness does not. Even when there are no objects to be known as in deep sleep, consciousness is present. For its positive manifestation, consciousness like light needs objects but it is never absent.[6]

If one's self is non-existent, the existence of everything else does not matter for him, Even the Absolute Brahman does not exist for him. Therefore, a Vedāntin starts to know Brahman the Supreme, the Ultimate Reality, on the basis of his own inner self. The ultimate Reality of mokṣa or freedom from the temporality and the attainment of the eternity is not possible unless and until one has attained the knowledge of non-dual Brahman. In order to have that

6. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra*, (London ; George Allen & Unwin, p. 124.

Brahman-knowledge (Brahmanjñāna), one needs to remove one's avidyā or ignorance by the realization of one's self or Ātman. The self-realization clears up the frosty path of Māyā and gives the enlightened vision of the divine ascent. It is a kind of lift-off from the temporality to the eternity.

The self-realization or the ascent to that divine summit of eternity is not a bed of roses. There are thousands of obstacles on that upward journey. Brahman's Māyā or the phenomenal world is so enticing and misleading that one gets lost while trying to set one's self aright. The reason is that Māyā or the phenomenal world is not illusory or something non-existent. It is not unreal, because Brahman the Supreme, known as the Real, will never contain anything unreal, and therefore, it is not easy to liberate one's self from this indescribable (anirvacaniya) Māyā or phenomena. It is so because Brahman wants it this way. It is His nature, līlā, play. The Brahma Sūtra says that "the Creation is Brahman's sport, lokavat tu lilā kaivalyam" (B S II-I-33). Dr. Radhakrishnan interprets Śaṁkara's view on this līlā, creation, or Māyā :

> Ś. uses the example of breathing which goes on without reference to any extraneous purpose, merely following the law of its own nature. So also creation proceeds from the nature of the Supreme without reference to any purpose. We cannot question why God's nature is what it is. We have to accept it.[7]

In order to understand Śaṁkara's interpretation of the Reality, it is necessary to have an idea of Śaṁkara's theory of existentialism which advocates three kinds of existence : (1) the pāramārthika or the transcendental existence, (2) the vyāvahārika or the empirical existence, (3) the pratibhāṣika or the illusory existence. Brahman is the Reality of the first category. The phenomenal world of time and space is of the second category. The imaginary things like

7. Ibid., p. 362,

the silver-in-the-shell or the snake-in-the-rope belong to the third category. Śaṁkara says that as the real knowledge of silver, by putting it side by side with the shell, corrects the mistaken knowledge of silver in the shell, so the real knowledge of the eternal Reality, Brahman or Ātman, removes the erroneous knowledge of the eternal Reality from the empirical temporality. It is the avidyā or ignorance which is the cause of this misunderstanding between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world, Brahman and His Māyā. The self-realization or Ātmajñāna will put us out of this indescribable Māyā or phenomena, and that is mokṣa, liberation, salvation, or nirvāña. That is the ultimate Reality, Brahman-Atman-Unity.

In order to attain the pāramārthika or the transcendental existence, Śaṁkara has placed four requisites: (I) the discerning knowledge of what is eternal and non-eternal, nityānityavastu-viveka, (2) detachment from the pleasure of this world and the other world, ihamūtra-phala-bhoga-virāga, (3) attainment of tranquility, self-control, renunciation, patience, concentration, and faith, sama-damādi-sādhanā-sampat, and (4) desire for liberation or mokṣa, mumuksutva. These are the fundamental rules for the students of Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedāntā.

The Vedānta, fundamentally, is a metaphysical science and not a physical science. Its goal is Brahman-Ātman-Unity, the ultimate Reality, and not the empirical reality of the temporal world. The Vedāntic seekers of Truth must start with the understanding that their ultimate is in the spiritual eternity beyond the mundane temporality. This temporal world or saṁsāra is simply a means to that end. One should not get involved in this worldly means if one wants to reach one's goal of eternity. He should use this worldly means only that much which will sustain his life here for the attainment of the eternity hereafter.

According to the Hindu Dharma, there are four stages of life (brahmacarya or the learning stage, gārhasthya or the householder's life, bānaprasthya or the forest life, and saṁnyās or the renounced life) and four grades of human

society (Brahmin or teacher, Kṣatriya or warrior, Vaiṣya or trader, and Sūdra or labour). As an Advaita Vedāntin, Śaṁkara does not deny these socio-personal stages and grades for the best in life. He says that these social-personal paraphernalia are good for the common seekers who want gradual liberation or krama-mukti. They are not good for the ardent seekers who want instantaneous liberation or sādyo-mukti. The gifted reformers like Śaṁkara (788-820 A.D.) and Vivekananda (1863-1902 A.D.) taught the Vedāntic gospel of the ultimate Reality to the world at a very early age of their life. At such a short span of life, these talented jñāna-yogins travelled far and wide and discussed the message of the Vedānta to lift up the people from the suffering of the temporal materialism to the happiness of the eternal spiritualism.

Advaita Vedāntins, like Śaṁkara, though the believers of nirguṇa (non-qualified) and nirākāra (formless) Brahman, are not against the belief of saguṇa (qualified) and sākāra (formed) Brahman. As a non-dualist, Śaṁkara has never denied the multi-sidedness of the approach in the journey to the Divinity. When one can have access to this worldly destinations either by land, air, or sea, then there is no reason why one can not reach the divine goal by either jñāna, karma, or bhakti. The great karma-yogin Janaka attained liberation or mokṣa in the luxury of his palace. He did not have to be an ascetic like Yājñavalkya for that spiritual attainment. Bhakti-yogin Rāmakriṣṇa, the devotee of Śakti, the goddess of Power, had reached so close to his spiritual object that, it is said, he talked to his deity face to face. His perfect devotion once more demonstrated the reality of the unity of humanity and Divinity in the land of India. The long-lost faith of the Hindus in the deities was once more revived at the triangular cultural intersection of the Hinduism, Mohammadanism, and Christianity. Prime Minister Nehru has expressed his impression of Rāmakriṣṇa in the following words :

> Sri Ramakrishna was completely beyond the average run of men. He

> appears rather to belong to the tradition of the great rishis of India, who have come from time to time to turn our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit. For throughout her long history, and in spite of what has gone on elsewhere in the world, India has never ignored the spiritual value of life. She has always laid stress on the search for truth, and has always welcomed the searchers of truth in whatever guise they have come. [8]

Bhakti-yoga is one of the three yogas described in the Bhagavadgītā. Due to the interrelationship of the jñāna, karma, and bhakti, the philosophy of the Gīta is most liked in the society of the Vedānta. The concept of the liberality of the means or marga and the unity of the goal of Divinity is the masterpiece of the Gītā, and therefore, it fits the best in the philosophy of the Vedāntic universalism. The Vedāntins interpret the bhakti-yoga or the symbolic worship as a process for the concentration of mind and the purification of soul. Brahman is personified here in the worshipping object of the devotee or bhakta. The bhakta does not see mere lifeless statue in front of him. He sees the omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient Brahman in that idol. The idol is the symbol of the Divine. The jñāna or knowledge of the formless (nirākāra) Brahman is not easy to have for all persons, but the personified Brahman can be easily understood and revered by the commons, and through this devotional process eventually the ardent devotees like Rāmakriṣṇa, Chaitanya, and Mīrā can attain the highest knowledge, Brahmajñāna. In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa says: "Those devotees are exceedingly dear to Me, bhaktas te 'tiva me priyaḥ" (B.G. XII-20). Dr, Radhakrishnan explains the image worship :

> There is such a thing as *pratikopasana* or symbol worship. This is an aid to

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8. Christopher Isherwood (ed), *Vedanta for Modern Man,* essay by Jawharlal Nehru. (California : Vedanta Press. 1964), p. 122.

> worship. The symbolic is not the imaginary. Slowly we get beyond the symbol to the object symbolised. Until we reach the Highest, we gain rewards great or small according to our aims and objects. Ś. observes that on account of our imperfections we connect the Omnipresent Lord with limited abodes. 'Image worship is the first, doing *japa* and chanting *mantras* is the middle; meditation or mental worship is superior; reflection on one's own true nature is the highest of all'. Image worship is a means to realisation. When we gain our ends, the means fall away. Lamps are useful so long as we live in darkness, but when the sun arises they cease to be of any help.[9]

The philosophy of the Vedānta believes in the reality of avatāra or divine incarnation. As a container and sustainer, the Supreme Reality, from our point of view, does the work of a creator (Brahma), a sustainer (Viṣṇu), and a destroyer (Maheśa). Supreme (Brahman), God (Īsvara), and the world (saṁsāra) are not three separate entities. They are three aspects of the One. They look different to us because we see from the lower level. Once we will ascend to the upper level through jñāna or wisdom, we have the same view all over, says Śaṁkara. The universal self pervades in all. The individual selves of the human, sub-human, and super-human beings are like the parts of the whole. Śaṁkara's advaita or non-dual concept on the matter of Self is best described in his book 'Vivekacudamani':

svayṁ brahmā svayṁ visṇu
svaymindrah svayṁ śivaḥ
svayṁ viśvamidaṁ sārvaṁ
svasmādanyanna kincana

9. S. Radhakrishnan. *The Brahma Sutra* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 173-174.

> The Self is Brahma, the Self is Viṣṇu, the Self is Indra, the Self is Siva ; the Self is all this universe. Nothing exists except the Self.
>
> (Vivekachudamani 388)

From the Advaita or the non-dualistic point of view, God takes birth on the earth is a relative truth and not an absolute Truth. Śaṁkara believes the theory that for the protection of the good and the destruction of the evil, God descends on the earth, as the Hindu literature (śruti) says. There is no proof to deny the descent of the Divinne for some divine purpose. All the scriptures from the Vedas to the Bible and further support the advent of God on the earth for some unknown cause. The Gītā's expression on the coming of the Lord : "dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge-yuge, for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age" (B.G. IV-8) is always a reminder to the Vedāntins, Advaita or Dvaita.

The Advaita Vedānta of Śaṁkara believes in the theory of karma or the law of action and reaction, cause and effect. Like the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha, the liberation or mokśa is the goal of the Advaita Vedānta. For the attainment of that goal, one has to make a continuous effort. This enticing world of phenomena or Māyā is not easy to get rid of. According to the law of karma, one must do good deeds for the good results. He must build his present for the future. Karma (action) is our freedom, and karma is our bondage. In order to be free from the cyclic birth, death and rebirth, the Advaita Vedānta always advocates the niṣkāma karma-yoga or the detached action of the Gītā. Śaṁkara's Vedāntic four principles of discrimination, disinclination, renunciation, and liberation are the fundamentals for the attainment of the highest.

Finally, I shall say that Śaṁkara's interpretation of the Vedanta (the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā) is centered to the goal of self-realization, the realization of the Absolute. Truth-Consciousness-Bliss or sat-cit-ānanda is the Reality of the Supreme. Śaṁkara

teaches us to be conscious of our eternal bliss which will come after we have liberated ourselves from the temporal world. His declaration of "brahma tat tvam asi bhava yatmani, that Brahman art thou, meditate on this in thy mind" (Vivekachudamani 260) is the boldest of the truths told of the Divine. Śaṁkara's Vivekachudamani concludes on the Vedānta :

vedāntasidhāntaniruktireṣā
brahmaiva jīvāḥ saklaṁ jagacca
akhandarūpasthitireva mokṣo
brahmadvitīye śṛutayaḥ pramānam

> The verdict of all discussions on the Vedānta is that the Jīva and the whole universe are nothing but Brahman, and that liberation means abiding in Brahman, the indivisible Entity. The Shrutis themselves are authority (for the statement) that Brahman is One without a second.
>
> (Vivekachudamani 478)

Śaṁkara's Vedāntic philosophy thus teaches the reality of non-dual Brahman and the unreality of the dual Māyā. Māyā does not exist of its own. It exists as the shadow of the Real (Brahman the Absolute). This shadowy world of phenomena or Māyā is as negligible as any mirage or rainbow. After the attainment of wisdom or vidyā, this worldly mirage will disappear. After the removal of the cloud of ignorance or avidyā, the clear sky of Brahman the Supreme will be visible,

Unity in diversity is the Vedantic concept of the Reality of the universe. The diversity of the world visible in multiple forms and shapes is like the variety of jars made out of the same clay. The jar-maker can only tell the oneness of the jars of innumberable shapes, sizes, colors, and capacities. This mystery of unity in diversity is no longer a mystery to the person who has known the maker and thereby his manufucturing mechanism. Once one knows Brahman the Maker, one automatically ends one's duality and becomes one with him.

Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedānta shines like a lighthouse for the ignorant people in general and the dogmatic Hindus in particular. It has saved the Hinduism from its total downfall at the dusk of Buddhism and the dawn of the Islam in India. The end of ritualism and the beginning of universalism is the greatest contribution Śaṁkara has extended to the Hindu religion. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes on Śaṁkara's magnetic personality :

> Supreme as a philosopher and a dialectician, great as a man of calm judgment and wide toleration, Śaṁkara taught us to love truth ; respect reason and realise the purpose of life. Twelve centuries have passed, and yet his influence is visible. He destroyed many an old dogma, not by violently attacking it, but quietly suggesting something more reasonable, which was at the same time more spiritual too... He was not a dreaming idealist, but a practical visionary, a philosopher, and at the same time a man of action, what we may call a social idealist on the grand scale. Even those who do not agree with his general attitude to life will not be reluctant to allow him a place among the immortals.[10]

Words are inadequate to describe the Vedāntic influence of Śaṁkara on the medieval philosophers and poets like Rāmānuja, Mādhava, Sureśvara, Tulsī, Soor, Kavīra, and others down to the modern age of the world-wide missionary work of the Vedānta Society founded by Vivekananda. The Advaita Vedānta says that self-realization is God-realization irrespective of one's nationality, race, and religion.

10. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (8th Impression : London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 658.

Chapter IX

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion I want to summarize the Vedāntic and the Buddhist thoughts as realized and interpreted by Śaṁkara and Nāgārjuna. Both of these great philosophers of the top have revived and vitalized the fading philosophies of their ancient religions. The vivid example of the death of many ancient religions shows that, unlike the Hinduism and Buddhism, they failed to survive because they did not have the talented reformers like Śaṁkara and Nāgārjuna to transfuse new philosophical blood in them. If the theory of survival of the fittest is true, then the credit goes to the goodness of these living religions whose great philosophies attracted their spiritual reformers and intellectual commentators.

In my entire thesis, I have endeavored to explain two main facts: first, the concept of the reality in the Vedānta and Buddhism; secondly, the interpretation of that revealed reality by Śaṁkara and Nñgārjuna. From thc beginning to the end, my goal has been in the thesis to define and describe, the revealed and unveiled reality of these two great thoughts, and for that purpose, I have made all possible efforts to collect the relevant materials from all possible sources. In support of my interpretation of the Vedāntic and Buddhist reality, I have tried to quote the authentic and authoritative philosophers' and writers' writings.

In the philosophy of the Vedānta, I have dealt with the Upaniṣadic knowledge of one Brahman the Supreme, the Brahma Sūtra doctrine of Brahman and Māyā, and the Bhagavadgītā's message of Karma, Jñāna, and Bhakti. These above mentioned scriptures are called the trinity or the prasthāna traya of the Hinduism, and they are the contents of the Vedānta. All the Vedāntic philosophers have to regard these texts, whether they are advaita,

dvaita, dvaitādvaita, or viśiṣṭādvaita (non-dualist, dualist, dualist-non-dualist, or qualified non-dualist).

The Upaniṣads in general believe in the reality of Brahman the Absolute, Brahman the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinite, satyam jñānam anantam brahma (T.U. II-1-1). In Brahman the Supreme, the duality of the world exists not in reality but in ignorance or ajñāna. The empirical world of phenomena is temporal, and the world beyond this temporal is eternal. That eternal Reality is both transcendent and immanent. The immanent Reality is called Ātman or self. The Upaniśads say : Thou art That, tat tvam asi (C.U VI-8-7). The Upaniṣads have set some psycho-physical rules for the realization of self (Ātmajñāna). It is not possible to realize or understand Brahman the Absolute (nirākāra Brahman) who is transcendent, but it is posssble to realize the self or Ātman (sākāra Brahman) who is immanent Brahman. This is the ultimate Reality of the Upaniṣads.

The philosophy of the Buddha is based on his Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path. These are his realized truths and experienced paths. The Buddha's Four Noble Truths (suffering, cause of suffering, removal of suflering, and remedy of suffering) are aiming at the permanent cessation of sorrow (duḥkha) and the attainment of Nirvāṇa on the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the reality of the teachings of the Buddhā, The experience of his Nirvāṇa or liberation is his ultimate Reality, and he teaches his followers to realize the same.

The law of karma or the law of nature is the law of dharma of the Buddha. One must obey the law of nature by being the part of it in order to get the best out of it. The highest for the Buddha is the experience of Nirvāṇa or the eternal bliss for which one must take refuge to the Buddha (wisdom), the Saṁgha (wise community), and the Dharma (the law of nature).

The Brahma Sūtra explains the doctrine of Brahman and Māyā which represent the eternal and the temporal, the transcendental and the empirical. The mystery of the unity in diversity is no longer a mystery once one understands

the oneness of Brahman the Supreme and His play of Māyā. In the process of logical arguments, the Brahma Sūtra intends to explain the truth of Brahman the Absolute.

The philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā has been interpreted in many ways by many commentators, and each one is fruitfully applicable. The theme of all the interpretations revolve around one common philosophy of detached action or niṣkāma yoga. No matter what one does, one must do that detached, and then one is sure to attain success. Frustration, helplessness, and attachment are the enemies of man, heralds the Gītā.

I have discussed here the doctrine of karma, jñāna, and bhakti. These karma yoga or the action, the jñāna yoga or the knowledge, and the bhakti yoga or the devotion are the three basic means to attain any goal in general and the spiritual goal in particular. One must choose the right path according to one's will and capacity, One must follow the law of one's own nature. The way to God is multi-sided. As the strong will to go to the moon made a man land on the moon, so an infallible determination to know God will some day undoubtedly succeed. This is the practical teaching of Lord Kṛṣṇa to his disciple Arjuna.

Śaṁkara is the great commentator of all the Vedāntic philosophies discussed in this paper. His Vedāntic interpretation centers around the Advaitism or non-dualism. Brahman the Supreme is one and the knowledge of phenomenal multiplicity is ignorance or avidyā.

Tat tvam asi or That art Thou (C. U. VI-8-7) is the great Upaniṣadic philosophy Śaṁkara upholds in his entire philosophy of life. Śaṁkara says that once one understands this mystery of the Supreme, one is free from this cyclic order of birth, death, and rebirth. A liberated soul or muktātmā is he who has realized his self or Ātman (immanent Brahman). The fruit of the self-realization is eternal bliss or paramānanda.

Śaṁkara in his commentaries on the prasthāna traya—the Upaniṣada, the Brahma Sūtra, and the Bhagavadgītā—always condemns this temporal world or Māyā and asks

people to renounce this miserable world as early as possible and search the eternal inside. All being the one, the self inside is the universal Self outside, and, therefore, the self-realization is the Brahman-realization.

Nāgārjuna was a philosopher of reason and not dogma. Though he was one of the great Buddhists of his time, yet he never believed the Buddha as a superman to be worshipped. He wanted to understand what the Buddha taught, and accordingly he has interpreated Buddhism.

Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy is based on the Buddha's theory of Middle Way or the way between two extremes of indulgence and self-mortification, His theory of śūnyatā or emptiness tries to explain the relativity of the things which do not have any self-existence, His theory of pratītyasamutpāda or dependent origination explains the interrelatedness of the phenomena. Things do not exist absolutely but relatively.

Finally, I shall conclude saying that both the Vedānta and Buddhism are complementary to each other and not contradictory. Dr. Radhakrishnan finalizes this view :

> The inclusion of Buddha among the avatārs of Visnu means that he appeared for the establishment of the Vedic dharma, and not for the undermining of it. There are no doubt similarities between the views of Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, and this is not surprising in view of the fact that both these systems had for their background the Upaniṣads,[1]

As the philosophy starts in wonder and ends in wisdom, so did the philosophies of the Vedānta and Budddism start in wonder and rest on the achievement of wisdom. Both of these thoughts exist between the two extremes with enough freedom to shape one's eternal destiny. Humanitarianism is the foundation of their universal outlook. They teach to build the individual personalities for the solidified universality.

1. S, Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* Vol. 2, (8th Imp. ! London : George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p, 472.

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APPENDIXES

A. List of Ābbreviations

Aitareya Upaniṣad	A.U.
Bhagavadgītā	B.G.
Bṛhad-āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad	B.U.
Brahma Sūtra	B.S.
Chāndogya Upaniṣad	C.U.
Dhammapada	Dh.
Īśa Upaniṣad	Īśa
Kena Upaniṣad	Kena
Kaṭha Upaniṣad	Kathā
S. Radhakrishnan	S.R.
Taittirīya Upaniṣad	T.U.

B. Scheme of Transliteration

Vowels	a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ l e ai o au
anusvāra	ṁ
visarga	ḥ
Consonants	
gutturals	k kh g gh ṅ
palatals	c ch j jh ñ
cerebrals	ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ
dentals	t th d dh n
labials	p ph b dh m
semi-vowels	y r l v
sibilants	s as in sun
	ś as in shine
	ṣ as in shun
aspirate	h

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